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SYRIA AND THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT  
1965-1975

by

RICHARD J. L'HEUREUX

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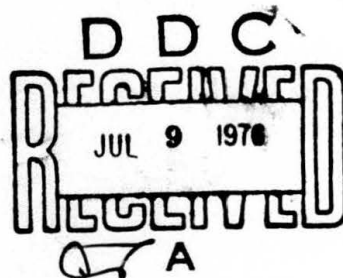
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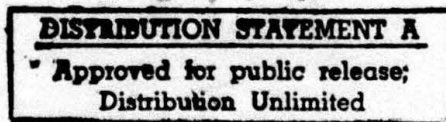
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## PREFACE

*report*  
This research endeavors to explore one of those many elusive variables in the complicated confrontation environment of the Middle East. That variable includes consideration of the inherent strength and political influence of the Palestinian Resistance Movement, and why and how since the first al Fatah raid of 1965 Syria has proven to be, if not the most consistent, at least the most practically helpful of those Arab regimes who have at one time or another chosen to patronize the movement. In focusing attention on Syrian involvement with the resistance movement, this study intends to give one an opportunity to observe the politics and potentialities of the resistance as it is effected by its relationship with patron regimes.

The question of guerilla strength and viability is of course a main concern of this study. But more importantly its intent is to smoke out the sometimes enigmatic, often secret Syrian policies guiding the relationship with the Palestinians, and doing so try to determine how the Palestine issue has fit into Syrian perceptions of the Arab-Israeli dispute and general Arab politics. Doing so it will contrast the policies of the present regime of Hafez al Assad with those of his neo-Baath predecessor.

The study presents the issues chronologically, and thus in the main is a history of the relationship, acting much as a barometer registering the periodic waxing and waning of guerilla fortunes vis-a-vis Syria. But beyond registering the phenomena historically the study attempts to determine whether the Palestinian resistance can be assured of some practicable level of support (a bottom line if you will) in its relations with Syria.

The research does not consider non-guerilla Palestinian leadership for the simple reason that this grouping has failed to gain any significant degree of power over the nationalist movement. Indeed, even though non-guerilla leaders are adequately represented in the legislative body of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the executive bodies and the de facto control is

exercized by members of guerilla organizations.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in speaking of the Palestinian Resistance Movement this study is referring specifically to those groups of guerillas (commandos, fedayeen--the terms shall be used interchangeably) committed to covert organization and violence as agents in their efforts to realize national ambitions. As a final point of introduction, there are several methods of transliterating Arabic words into English form. This study will employ those renderings most commonly used in American newspapers.

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<sup>1</sup>Non-guerilla leadership is discussed in William B. Quandt, Palestinian Nationalism: Its Political and Military Dimensions (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1971), pp. 48-9; and in Bernard Lewis, "The Palestinians and the PLO," Commentary, January 1975, pp. 37-8.

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## I. BEFORE ASSAD

### The Rise of al Fatah

The beginning of active Palestinian resistance is most often dated from January 1, 1965. Yasser Arafat himself describes this day as the start of the Palestine revolution for it was the occasion for the first al Fatah raid on Israel. It was launched from Syria, later announced from Syria, and with little doubt sanctioned by the Syrian regime of Lt. Gen. Amin al Hafez.

There is some evidence, however, of Palestinian infiltration in years prior. Organized operations against the Israelis actually preceded the Sinai War of 1956, but rather than being initiated by the Palestinians, it seems Palestinian refugees were recruited and directed by outside elements, most likely Egyptian embassy staffs, and possibly the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.<sup>1</sup> After the Sinai War and up to January 1965, though the most serious clashes in the Arab-Israeli dispute were occurring on the Syrian-Israeli border, there is no evidence of Palestinian organizations taking an active military role in the confrontation. Some Palestinians may have infiltrated but this seems to have been restricted to individual attempts to salvage damaged pride, to regain lost property, or to gather intelligence for the Syrian military.

While most specialists would equate al Fatah's beginnings with that of the Palestinian resistance, a rival claim might hold that the resistance began with the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) a year earlier. The Arab League Conference of January 1964, gathered to discuss plans to counter Israel's diversion of Jordan river water, appointed Ahmad al Shuqairi to develop an organization and an army to represent exclusively Palestinian interests. At first the Syrian Baathist regime seemed interested in the plan. After all Shuqairi had served a number of years for their Foreign Affairs Ministry, but when they realized he was more inclined to assume United

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<sup>1</sup>See Lt. Gen. E. L. M. Burns, Between Arab and Israeli (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1963), pp 86-133.

Arab Republic (UAR) interpretations of Palestinian interests, and that the PLO was being staffed from among the "established" bourgeois elites, the regime became somewhat suspicious.<sup>1</sup> Anti-Nasser sentiment was strong in Syria and at the conference a serious breach developed between President Hafez and UAR President Nasser. Hafez adopted a belligerent attitude stating that "now was the time for the Arabs to mass for a strike against Israel," but Nasser cautioned that far more strength and unity was needed.<sup>2</sup> Toward the end of the year the Syrian attitude hardened even more, for it became obvious that she would have to take unilateral action against the Israeli water projects. Several military confrontations, which increased in tempo, led to Israeli air strikes on Syria in November. This had the effect of increasing the distance between the Baathists and the PLO-UAR alliance. To counter the situation, Syria was able to exploit two interesting opportunities. First, Shuqairi was charged with creating the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), which, since a Palestinian state did not yet exist, would have to be barracked, trained, and supplied by the Arab states. Syria was in a unique position for this task because of her strategic location, and her confrontation attitude, and also because both Lebanon and Jordan refused to allow PLA troops on their soil. Regardless of how suspicious Shuqairi might be of Syrian intentions, it was only logical that a major portion of PLA training be accomplished in Syria. By 1965 this training was underway, and Syrian trainers and doctrine poured down upon the young Palestinian recruits.<sup>3</sup>

The second opportunity was probably presented by the Algerians, who were the first to have provided training to al Fatah personnel. Yasser Arafat, the head of al Fatah, left Kuwait in 1964 and visited Algeria, during which time he was introduced to the Syrians.<sup>4</sup> By the end of 1964 his operations had

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<sup>1</sup>Fuad Jabber, The Palestinian Resistance and Inter-Arab Politics (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1971), p. 4; Michael Hudson, "The Palestinian Arab Resistance Movements its Significance in the Middle East Crisis," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Summer 1969), p. 297.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 19 January 1964.

<sup>3</sup>Shuqairi announced on December 4, 1964 that the Palestinian youth in Jordan would receive military training in Syria. The New York Times, 5 December 1964.

<sup>4</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report, Vol. 5, No. 19 (Profile), 13 May 1974; see also John Amos, "The Palestinian Resistance Movement," University of California at Berkeley, 1970 (typewritten), p. 70.



been established in Syria, most likely in refugee camps near Duma and al Hama, both on the outskirts of Damascus. With approximately 100,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria alone, and most of them in the Damascus region, al Fatah had ample sources of recruitment.

Syria perceived a number of advantages in supporting guerilla operations: first, it provided another method of gaining the initiative from Nasser; second, along with her influence in the PLA she saw it as an opportunity to contain the prestige of the PLO; third, it was a way to pressure other Arab regimes to contribute to the battle; and fourth, theoretically it would weaken the will of the Israelis to continue such operations as the water diversion project (the first al Fatah strikes were on the water project). Support of al Fatah was clearly a minority position however, for most regimes felt the raids would encourage Israel to attack before they were ready.<sup>1</sup> Both the UAR and the Soviet Union suspected al Fatah of being a branch of the Muslem Brotherhood, and thus reactionary.<sup>2</sup> Jordan was particularly hostile but for different reasons. Since al Fatah raids passed through it, King Hussein could expect reprisal strikes on Jordan from Israel. Hussein's hostility was not inconsequential for the first al Fatah battle fatality had been caused by his Arab Legion. Since Syria was the only state on Israel's periphery to provide al Fatah with assistance, the group was vulnerable to Syrian pressure. Not until after the June War of 1967 did it attain a significant degree of independence.

Throughout 1965 guerilla operations proceeded, finally bringing Israeli strikes on Jordan in May and September. Though the guerillas infiltrated from Jordanian territory, Israel clearly blamed Syria for financing and arming them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed, one report claims that the United Arab Command accused al Fatah of being a CENTO ruse employed to provide Israel with the pretext to strike. An-Nahar Arab Report (Profile), 13 May 1974. Fuad Jabber speculates that without Syria's help "the fedayeen movement would have probably ceased to exist in the first half of 1965." Palestinian Resistance and Inter-Arab Politics, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>There is some evidence that Arafat had been a member of the Muslem Brotherhood which must have given the Syrian Baathists suspicions of their own.

<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that several al Fatah raids were timed to coincide with the Arab Premiers Conference and the June PLO meeting in Cairo. The New York Times, 3 June 1965.

The Syrian-Israeli border was not, however, inactive. Throughout the year artillery and small arms duels occurred north of the Sea of Galilee.

Inside Syria during the summer of 1965 two broad coalitions within the Baath party were maneuvering for a position of dominance. A cleavage separated the forces of Maj. Gen. Salah Jadid, an Alawite with strong support among the post 1948 War generation of highly politicized leftist officers and civilians,<sup>1</sup> and the forces of the more traditional incumbent, Amin al Hafez. The split was largely ideological, with Jadid outbidding Hafez in socialist orthodoxy, and attacking him for mending fences with Egypt and repatronizing the urban middle class. During the latter half of 1965 Jadid's neo-Baath forces continued gaining strength within the party until its extremist politics became almost indistinguishable from that of the Baath party.<sup>2</sup>

An unsuccessful early bid for power by Jadid left his civilian rival, Salah al din Bitar, premier in December. Bitar's desire to patch things up with the UAR and moderate Jadid's Marxist influence prompted him to issue a decree reshuffling the nation's legislature. The decree, published on February 15, eliminated 19 army officers from membership. These officers had been considered the "cream of the ideological army." Additional attempts to weaken his adversaries by transferring "political" officers away from Damascus led to the overthrow of Bitar and Hafez after a bloody coup on February 23. The man responsible for the coup, Jadid, took power from behind the scene after setting up Dr. Nureddin Attassi as President and Dr. Yussef Zayen as Premier.<sup>3</sup> Jadid dominated the 16 man Presidium of the party, making Attassi's cabinet wholly dependent on it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Alawites form the largest minority in Syria. Making up approximately 12 percent of the population, most of them live in the Latakia district. They are of a religious sect which combines some ancient pagan customs with elements of Christianity and Shia Islam. Though they are economically and culturally relatively backward, the percentage of Alawites in the Army (and especially the officer corps) is far greater than that in the population as a whole.

<sup>2</sup>Itamar Rabinovich, Syria Under the Ba'th 1963-66 (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972), pp. 182-95; see also Kamel S. Abu Jaber, The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup>Jadid was in the same ticklish situation Assad would be in 1970. Being Alawite he had to take into account the sensitivities of the majority Sunni Muslem population. Up to that time Syrian Presidents had only been Sunni.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 16, 25, 26 February; 6 March; 29 September 1966.

Iraq and the UAR had little reason to welcome the coup, and in fact condemned it. The Soviets, on the other hand, warmed to the regime after it quickly adopted a far more leftist program which, in the cabinet's terms, would work with "progressive and leftist elements of the Arab world so they can stand against imperialist moves and alliances."<sup>1</sup> In addition, the regime claimed that Palestine was Syria's foremost problem. The Syrians seem to have at least tentatively interested the Soviets in al Fatah, which at this time was on very good terms with the Syrian Army. In April the Soviets joined in a communique with the neo-Baath recognizing the resistance movement. By the end of the year the USSR was sending arms specifically for, though not directly to, the guerillas.<sup>2</sup>

The new regime permitted al Fatah to stage raids directly from Syria. These operations in May, June, and July and several throughout the first half of the year from Jordan, prompted an Israeli airstrike on Syrian military positions and construction sites. Not surprisingly, al Fatah had claimed credit for five raids in the three weeks preceding the strike, broadcasting their communiques on official Damascus radio.<sup>3</sup>

The Israeli sentiment about the raiding was stated at the United Nations Security Council in July. Israeli representative Michael Comay said, as paraphrased by the UN, that:

in the last eighteen months El Fatah had raided Israeli territory 53 times. From the beginning it had been clear to Israel that Syria was behind the El Fatah activities. El Fatah appeared to be no more than a front for the undercover activities of the Syrian Government.

George Tomeh, the Syrian representative, disclaimed any Syrian responsibility for the raids.<sup>4</sup>

The new Syrian regime also found special use for the PLO. Shuqairi was

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 3 March 1966.

<sup>2</sup>John K. Cooley, Green March Black September (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1973), p. 159; The New York Times, 16 October 1966.

<sup>3</sup>The guerilla raids may have provided a convenient reason for destroying Syrian equipment engaged in diverting the Baniyas river.

<sup>4</sup>United Nations Office of Public Information, UN Monthly Chronicle (August-September 1966), pp. 3-6; The New York Times, 15 October 1966. For an interesting though controversial justification for Israel's delay in striking at Syria see Fred J. Khouri, The Arab-Israeli Dilemma (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968), p. 231.

fond of confrontation rhetoric often aimed at the non-combatants, though he himself was averse to commando activities (not until 1967 did the PLO sponsor its own guerilla incursions). Syria encouraged Shuqairi's verbal battle with King Hussein. At the same time the Syrians criticized the more moderate Baath regime in Iraq. As Malcolm Kerr explains, the tactics were intended to embarrass the UAR into moving further left. As a result, in November 1966, Syria and the UAR effected a mutual defense treaty for the first time since their split in 1961. Prior to that date Syria had sponsored a number of guerilla raids, military confrontations, and sabotage attempts against Israel. Nasser felt that the Syrian action could better be moderated if a formal agreement were consummated. However, he still felt strongly that the Arabs were not yet prepared for war. The two countries were also drawn together in defense against what they saw as King Faisal's attempts to use an Islamic alliance to isolate the progressive states. By the end of the year the Arab world was pretty much divided on ideological lines, with the Syrian-UAR axis poised against the Saudi-Jordanian one.<sup>1</sup>

Nasser did gain some influence over Syria but perhaps at too high a cost, for the agreement not only signals a change in his attitude towards the guerillas and Hussein but towards the confrontation with Israel in general, ultimately leading to the disastrous June War.

#### Syria and the PLF

In the latter part of 1966 the Syrian regime, in an apparent attempt to introduce a sympathetic ideology into the Palestinian resistance, sponsored a group in opposition to al Fatah called the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF). Ahmad Jibril, formerly associated with the military branch of al Fatah, became the head. At one time Jibril had been an officer in the Syrian Army, but having been accused of being a Communist he was dismissed.

Little is available about the PLF's activities, or indeed about its politics, except that it operated on the far left and its leader (later to become the head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command, PFLP-GC) was moved to eccentricity. John Amos states that in 1966 Jibril had described Arafat "as an Egyptian agent who slavishly obeyed the orders of

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<sup>1</sup>The Arab Cold War (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 121; see also Jabber, The Palestinian Resistance, pp. 8-9.

Cairo."<sup>1</sup> This is ironic since Arafat was fond of describing Shuqairi in much the same way. It can be surmised that the neo-Baath regime, by supporting Jibril, was making a measured attempt at giving an ideological slant to the resistance movement, much as it had to the Arab-Israeli confrontation in general. Though al Fatah was not yet powerful enough to cause great concern to the regime, it would not hurt to create an opposition group which would force Arafat to move further left to compete for recruits.

#### Commando Activity up to the June War

Syrian sponsored guerilla raids were interrupted for a short time after the Israelis employed tanks and aircraft in a retaliatory strike on the Jordanian village of al Samu on November 13. Though Jordan was not accused of sponsoring the raid Israel held her liable because her security forces had not taken strong enough action to prevent them from being staged on her soil.<sup>2</sup> By early December al Fatah had begun sabotage operations again, which proliferated up to the June 1967 War. The situation was intensified by the probable use of regular Syrian Army personnel for sabotage, mining, and shallow penetration of the border area. Guerilla infiltration from Syria, Jordan and even from Lebanon,<sup>3</sup> seemed in several cases to be assisting Syrian military harassment of Israel's Jordan river project. But, compared with some of the conventional tank and artillery duels between Syrian and Israeli Army units, the guerilla attacks were of little military consequence.

Despite the limited military damage caused by these infiltrations, the Israeli reprisal at al Samu assured the Syrians that an intensification of raiding would lead to more reprisals. Since Syria was encouraging an intensification, her warning that Israel was preparing an attack on her was not only plausible, but likely--although the intensity of this expected attack was, no doubt, greatly exaggerated. The important fact to note is that Syria utilized the guerilla activity to maneuver the UAR into a confrontation posture. The

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<sup>1</sup>"The Palestinian Resistance Movement," p. 43. Jibril's statement can't, however, be entirely dismissed. Arafat had good reason to balance Syrian pressure with UAR support. The PLF is also mentioned in Cooley, Green March Black September, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>UN Monthly Chronicle (December 1966), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 4 January; 7 May 1967.

irony is that once Nasser took the initiative Syria's position became of relatively little consequence. Nasser's poor judgement in the whole affair seems amplified by the fact that not even for the sake of solidarity in battle did the neo-Baathists warm to King Hussein, who on 30 May concluded a defense treaty with Nasser and a temporary truce with his arch-rival Shuqairi.<sup>1</sup>

Of significant irony too is the fact that neither Syria nor al Fatah contributed much in the war. Syrian offensive participation, by Israeli reports, was confined to shelling of border communities and aborted attempts to occupy two Israeli settlements.<sup>2</sup> Heavy fighting did, however, take place on the Syrian front when Israeli forces executed a major offensive against the Golan Heights June 9 and 10. On June 10, facing almost certain defeat, Syria hastily withdrew its forces.<sup>3</sup> Michael Van Dusen claims that Syrian troops were withdrawn in order to protect Damascus, implying that Damascus was threatened not by Israel, but by opponents of the regime.<sup>4</sup> Palestinian activity in the war seems to have been limited to largely ineffective although determined resistance by the Egyptian (Ain Jalout) contingent of the PLA in the Gaza Strip. Individual soldiers of the PLA harassed Israeli troops for days after the war's conclusion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 22, 31 May; 3 June 1967. In the months preceding the June War Syria's enmity for Hussein, who had consistently condemned the guerillas, had been almost as severe as that for Israel. On May 21 Jordan accused Syria of sending an explosives laden car into a Jordanian border post. Its explosion killed 14 people. Whether Syria was guilty of the act is uncertain. That she could have been is meaningful. Even after the May 30 Cairo agreement Syrian media continued its attacks on Hussein.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 8 June 1967.

<sup>3</sup>Nadav Safran, From War to War (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), 375-80.

<sup>4</sup>"Intra- and Inter-Generational Conflict in the Syrian Army" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1973), p. 356 (footnote 1). Safran includes this as a possible explanation for Syria's June 10 withdrawal. From War to War, p. 381.

<sup>5</sup>Cooley claims that a total of 1,500 PLA regulars and PLO guerillas fought in Gaza. Green March, p. 97.



### Results of the June War

The war caused a shift in Jadid's policy of permitting guerilla raids to be launched from Syria. Whether for fear of further territorial expansion by Israel, or because of political and strategic improvements in Jordan, Syria and the guerillas came to an understanding meant to halt penetration from Syria--even though the Golan line was now longer and more penetrable. Fuad Jabber describes it as "a mutually agreeable and tacitly established policy designated to ensure the Syrian regime's support for the resistance."<sup>1</sup> As a result activity in the Golan was restricted to relatively few incidents of small arms and mortar fire between regular Syrian and Israeli forces. Moshe Dayan summed up the agreement's ramifications in October stating that "the Syrian cease-fire was being maintained without friction but ... the Syrians were training terrorists and sending them into Israel through Jordan."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, attacks across the Jordan river occurred at an unprecedented rate. Syria again held firmly to her statement that she was in no way connected with them.<sup>3</sup>

The latter half of 1967 became especially difficult for King Hussein. Officially his position was that Jordan would be unrelenting in its fight against the terrorists, although he did suggest that should a political impasse with Israel be reached his view might change. Yet the proliferation of commandos after the war, and pressure from his own troops to block Israeli reprisals on Jordan, suggested his later acceptance of their activity.<sup>4</sup> At this time training camps still remained in Syria.

The increase in the guerilla groups after the war reflected the Palestinians' realization that conventional warfare was not going to redress their grievances. Al Fatah's pre-war axiom that forcing Arab states into

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<sup>1</sup>"The Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Revolution, 1967-71," Journal of Palestine Studies (Winter 1973), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Dayan was likely making special reference to the October 20 capture of what Israel reported as a PLF squad. The New York Times, 21, 28 October 1967.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 27 September 1967.

<sup>4</sup>Jordanian tanks firing on Israeli positions in retaliation for alleged shelling of guerilla staging areas led to Israeli airstrikes, and artillery and tank exchanges on November 21. The New York Times, 13, 22 November 1967.

general warfare with Israel would result in repatriation proved woefully inadequate, especially in Syria's case. Al Fatah had, however, served an important function which was to provide "the conception of guerilla warfare as a viable alternative to action within the traditional framework of Arab political institutions."<sup>1</sup> New dislocation of some 400,000 refugees, lost lives and property, and refugee agitation in the marginally stable countries of Lebanon and Jordan, created ever increasing opportunities for the resistance groups to expand.

### PFLP and the Leftists

The most influential group to appear at this time was George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Despite its leftist ideology the PFLP was regarded suspiciously, and was at times harshly suppressed by the Syrians. Habash had been one of the founders of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in 1950, a Marxist political party which in 1963 competed with the Baath for power. Thereafter the ANM, staunchly opposed to the military clique controlling Syrian politics, tried with various combinations of opposition parties to oust the Baathists. Prior to the June War Habash had emphasized the politicization of the Palestinians. After the war, however, he adopted more belligerent tactics and united his organization Abtal with Jibril's PLF and another small group called Youth for Revenge. Utilizing the political structure of the ANM, the PFLP was able to influence Palestinians far more than might be suggested by its original size.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after the June War Habash made overtures for joint action with Arafat but apparently was rebuffed.<sup>3</sup> Arafat, seemingly for both personal and political reasons, was unsympathetic with Habash's radical ideology. Primarily, he was concerned that his ultimate power would be weakened by the disaffection of Arab regimes and Palestinian conservatives alienated by extremism.

The PFLP had been somewhat tolerated during the first months of its existence. Nevertheless, Habash, aware of the climate in Damascus, moved quickly

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<sup>1</sup>Jabber, Palestinian Resistance and Inter-Arab Politics, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Dana Adams Schmidt, Armageddon in the Middle East (New York: The John Day Co., 1974), p. 161; a lengthy account of the PFLP is provided in Amos, "The Palestinian Resistance Movement," pp. 28-33.

<sup>3</sup>Cooley, Green March, p. 139.

to establish himself in neighboring Jordan. By April 1968, however, Syria took action against the PFLP which had grown to at least 1,000 men strong. While Habash was in Damascus inquiring about the confiscation of a supply convoy, he and two colleagues were arrested and jailed for allegedly plotting against the government.<sup>1</sup> The reasons are a bit obscure but the ANM newspaper in Beirut al Hurriya gave two separate and possible reasons for the action. Its first account was that the Baathists were fearful of the efforts by the ANM to organize a national front opposition to the regime. A few days later the newspaper provided its second account, surmising that the arrests were intended to block the PFLP from continuing its resumption of raids from the Golan.<sup>2</sup> Concerning the latter, Israel reported renewal of Golan raids neither to the press, nor to the UN, which suggests that the PFLP never had resumed the raids. Claiming that resumed raids had been curtailed, however, was an effective way of contrasting Syria's reputed support for the Palestinian resistance with her unrelenting restriction on Golan operations.<sup>3</sup> The first account seems more accurate. Habash was having considerable success in politicizing the Palestinians which, in view of the large number living in the Damascus region, provided a very real threat to the Baathist regime.<sup>4</sup>

Habash escaped confinement seven months later. Meanwhile the PFLP was

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<sup>1</sup>Schmidt, Armageddon, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>Cited in The New York Times, 12, 16 April 1968.

<sup>3</sup>A primary reason Syria was able to control guerilla penetration was that being a confrontation state she had studded her Golan cease-fire zone with observation and combat posts. From positions of prominence on the heights Syrian units were able to monitor much of the action as it moved from Syria or from the Arkoub region of southeastern Lebanon. A few mortar rounds or marker flares which would identify raiders for the Israelis could abort an operation. The Israelis themselves give an accounting of how effective Syria's restrictions were. According to their sources "there were 1,288 acts of sabotage and border incidents between June 6, 1967 and December 31, 1968. Of these, 920 occurred in the Jordanian-Israeli sector ... with 166 in the Egyptian sector, 37 in the Syrian, 35 in the Lebanese and 130 in the Gaza Strip." Quote from The New York Times, 13 February 1969.

<sup>4</sup>In 1969 66.9 percent of Palestinian refugees in Syria lived in the muhafazat of Damascus. These 69.9 percent were 103,122 people out of a Damascus population of 1,053,048, or roughly 9 percent of the region's population. United Nations Economic and Social Office Beirut. Studies on Selected Development Problems in Various Countries of the Middle East, 1971 (ST/UNESOB/8), pp. 67 and 76.

being shaken by an internal struggle which witnessed Naif Hawatmeh (most likely with Syrian support) trying, in Habash's absence, to take over leadership of the organization. During the confrontation Ahmad Jibril broke away from the group and established his own commando operation, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine--General Command (PFLP-GC). Though Jibril was previously associated with the Baathist regime, it is uncertain whether Syria had anything to do with his departure. By this time Syria was taking more positive steps to control the resistance, i.e. laying the groundwork for her own commando organization.

The resistance may have been frustrated with Syria for restrictions on border penetration, but they could hardly deny satisfaction with her political gestures following the war, in particular, her rejection of UN Security Council Resolution 242 (November 22, 1967) and the associated diplomatic efforts of Dr. Gunnar Jarring, as well as her boycott of the Khartoum Conference. The Khartoum Conference was held in August 1967 by Arab states intent on developing a future coordinated strategy. It was conspicuously boycotted by Syria who regarded it as a forum for Nasser and Hussein to sanction a compromise solution with Israel. An emergency conference of the Baath party, called coincidentally with that of Khartoum, resolved that Arab land would be regained only by a "war of popular liberation," not by Arab summitry. Indeed, Syrian participation in summit conferences was rejected entirely.<sup>1</sup>

These moves had the effect of isolating Syria from almost all Arab states but Algeria. Her intransigence was received as badly in Moscow, thus dictating a cautious Soviet attitude which was to last until Lt. Gen. Hafez al Assad took over in 1970.<sup>2</sup> The Soviets made a somewhat tenuous effort to warm relations with the resistance movement in July 1968 when Arafat accompanied

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 31 August; 18 September 1967. See also Kerr, The Arab Cold War, p. 139; The Christian Science Monitor, 7 December 1967.

<sup>2</sup>Cooley, Green March, p. 164. Cooley relates that from 1967 to 1969 Soviet news correspondents were forbidden from covering guerilla operations from Jordan, suggesting their dissatisfaction with the resistance, p. 167. The USSR was especially disturbed by Syria's failure to follow a realistic policy by refusing to accept the existence of Israel and the partition of Palestine. But in addition, she was sensitive about Syrian overtures to other major powers, Communist China and France in particular, which would lead to the reduction of Soviet influence in the country. China, for example, had made significant headway in her association with the PLO, and though she had little influence over Syrian policies she nonetheless could be used as leverage over the USSR. The New York Times, 26 September 1966; 5 August; 11 December 1967.

Nasser to Moscow. The visit, however, proved unsuccessful for Arafat with the Soviets probably warning him that provoking Israel would do more harm to the movement than good.

### The Resistance Gains Power

Within the resistance movement itself conditions seemed to be improving for Arafat. In January 1968 eight of the largest groups (including the PFLP and the forerunner of al Saiqa) concluded the first significant agreement on guerilla coordination, which would ostensibly be directed by a joint command. The agreement, resulting from a conference in Cairo, was a manifestation of the same militant anti-PLO agitation that led to the resignation of Shuqairi on December 24, 1967.<sup>1</sup> The PLO had been discredited for its minimal participation in the June War. And the UAR, perturbed by Shuqairi's imprudent rhetoric, may have encouraged sentiment against his leadership of it.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the moderator of the conference, Dr. Isam Sartawi, was a staunch Nasserite, and that it was held in Cairo, indicates Arafat's desire to broaden his base by enlisting the support of Nasser. On his part Nasser seems to have shifted his position on the guerillas, providing not only arms and money, but possibly a training site at Faiyumas as well.<sup>3</sup> With increased support from other Arab regimes the guerillas could naturally decrease their dependence on Syria.

The real turning point for the guerillas came on March 21, 1968 at the battle of Karemeah, a refugee settlement on the east bank of the Jordan river. At Karemeah al Fatah commandos held their ground against a major Israeli retaliatory assault employing thousands of men. The Israeli attempt to dislodge al Fatah from the camp proved markedly counterproductive, for the popular support gained by the guerillas moved several Arab regimes to support them. Nasser, for example, gave them official backing and provided both al Fatah and the PLO with programming on the Middle East Radio. Contributions and recruits were showered upon the groups, and Hussein, heretofore doggedly opposed to the use of

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<sup>1</sup>In November al Fatah had asked the PLO to liquidate itself and turn its funds over to al Fatah. The New York Times, 16 November 1967.

<sup>2</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 28, 30 December 1967. He was fond of threatening to drive the Jews into the sea, with a war of annihilation.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 12 January 1968.



Jordan for staging infiltration, was forced to reverse his position and permit the guerillas greater latitude in establishing training bases, recruitment, organization, and military operations.<sup>1</sup>

#### A Weakened PLO

The PLO, on the other hand, was being weakened by internal conflicts and external criticism throughout 1968. The PFLP and Syria were particularly hostile to it. Manifesting this hostility, at the fourth session of the Palestine National Council (PNC) July 1968 Syria's al Saiqa contemptuously stayed away.<sup>2</sup> Later in the year al Fatah, which had been attempting to take over the PLO, and al Saiqa grew significantly more cooperative. Since al Saiqa was thus assured of leverage over the PLO, it went along with al Fatah's move (at the fifth session in February 1969) to dominate the PLO, at which time al Saiqa was left the second most influential bloc in the organization.<sup>3</sup>

As indicated previously Syria was given an opportunity to affect the power of the PLO by logistics, training, and command support to her contingent of the PLA. Syria capitalized on the opportunity by encouraging the independence of the PLA. As a result the PLO was faced with a challenge to its authority over Palestinian armed forces. A major clash took place prior to the July 1968 session of the PNC when, according to the pro-Cairo Beirut newspaper al Anwar, the PLA demanded and got separate representation for the meeting. The friction later surfaced when the PLO on July 29 replaced the PLA's commander Brig. Gen. Subhi al Jabi with Brig. Gen. Abd al Kader al Yahia. Mutineers within the PLA arrested Yahia on August 1 and confined him in Damascus, demanding that al Jabi be reinstated. There is little doubt that Syria was behind at least this latter episode, a view reinforced by the fact that a compromise

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<sup>1</sup>Fuad Jabber, "The Arab Regimes," p. 87; see also Dana Adams Schmidt's dispatch from Amman, "Commandos are Now the Heroes of the Arab World," The New York Times, 27 December 1968. The effects of Karamah on guerilla attitudes are apparent from interviews cited in Gerard Chaliand, The Palestine Resistance, trans. Michael Perl (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972).

<sup>2</sup>The PNC functions as the legislative body of the PLO, providing representation for both guerilla and non-guerilla elements. Its executive direction came first from the Executive Committee, supplemented in 1970 by the creation of a larger group called the Central Committee.

<sup>3</sup>Amos, "The Palestinian Resistance Movement," p. 12.



pro-Syrian officer, Brig. Gen. Misbah Budeiri, was eventually appointed to replace al Yahia.<sup>1</sup> A year later a similar incident occurred. Arafat, who by this time was in charge of the PLO and who was making every effort to subject the PLA to PLO authority, relieved Col. Uthman Haddad, at that time chief of staff. Haddad, supported by Syrian Defense Minister Hafez al Assad, ignored the order and only with great difficulty was Arafat able to replace him. Haddad, however, retained command of the PLA's Hittin Brigade stationed in Syria, and eventually regained his position as chief of staff.<sup>2</sup>

### Al Saiqa

Consistent with its attempt at controlling the resistance movement, and after withholding primary support from both al Fatah and the PFLP in the fall 1967, Syria established its own guerilla organization in early 1968. From the beginning Salah al Jadid took special interest in the group, tying it closely to the Syrian Baath Party (in deference to nationalist sympathies al Saiqa's authority was said to come from the Palestinian Branch of the Baath). Supplies and training came from the Syrian Army but the party, nonetheless, retained operational control and ensured that al Saiqa members espoused Baathist ideology. While most were Palestinians, at first largely drawn from the Palestinian Battalion of the Syrian Army or from the Hittin Brigade, there is evidence of non-Palestinian membership, particularly in leadership positions. One report has it that Syrian Baathists were required to serve a month in the guerilla organization.<sup>3</sup>

Al Saiqa claimed that its first raid in the Israeli occupied Syrian Golan Heights had been on the night of September 13, 1968.<sup>4</sup> Whether the raid had taken place or not, it is quite evident that restrictions were put on al Saiqa, encouraging it to set up operations in southeastern Lebanon, i.e., between the Hasbani River and Mount Hermon in an area known as the Arkoub. At

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 4, 11 August 1968; The Arab World Weekly, 2 October 1971; Quandt, Palestinian Nationalism, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Quandt, Palestinian Nationalism, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Amos, citing The Arab World Weekly, XVII, 79 (18 April 1970), in "The Palestinian Resistance Movement," p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 20 September 1968.

the same time the regime strongly encouraged al Fatah to shift the training camps to Jordan. A few operations may have been undertaken by al Saiqa from Syria but the main thrust after October was from the Arkoub. By the end of the year the group had approximately 1,500 commandos, which rivalled the PFLP in size. Two years later that number with enthusiastic Baathist support rose to about 6,000 of perhaps the best trained and best paid guerillas of all the groups.<sup>1</sup>

This significant manpower increase has in part been attributed to the domestic struggle going on in Syria between Jadid, and Defense Minister Assad. Their relationship is discussed in detail below. However, it is worthy noting here that al Saiqa had become an instrument that Jadid used to counter the influence Assad was gaining in the military wing of the party. Assad on the other hand was exploiting his close relations with Col. Haddad and the PLA.<sup>2</sup> The guerilla groups would provide Jadid with a military capability even if Assad's 80,000 man army proved noncompliant.

Syria often employed the guerilla for tasks quite remote from their stated purpose of regaining Palestine. This utilitarian policy suggests that the bloody clash between Jordanian forces and a commando group called Kataeb al Nasr, November 4-7, 1968, was as King Hussein claimed, the responsibility of Syria. Confusion about the incident arises from the fact that the Kataeb al Nasr had only a few weeks previously been called al Saiqa. Whether it was associated with the larger Syrian group of that name is uncertain but the following circumstances strongly imply that they were tied to Damascus.

On October 8 a number of armed men kidnapped the anti-Baathist Druse leader Hassan al Atrash from his refuge in Jordan. Since both Hussein and the Druse community suspected the Kataeb group, roadblocks were set up to arrest its members. In early November fighting broke out when some of the group resisted a check by a military patrol. A few days of sporadic skirmishing left about 25 people dead, more cooperation among the major groups including al Saiqa, suppression of Kataeb al Nasr, and at least a tentative agreement limiting guerilla power in Jordan.<sup>3</sup> It is uncertain whether Syria was specifically

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 3 December 1968; Quandt, Palestinian Nationalism, p. 23; Jabber, "The Arab Regimes", p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Quandt, Palestinian Nationalism, pp. 23-4; Jabber, "The Arab Regimes", p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 18 October; 5, 6, 16, 21 November 1968.

using the guerilla group in a conspiracy against Hussein, as the King claimed (she had continually broadcast verbal attacks on the regime). It is quite likely, however, that she would employ Kataeb al Nasr in a political kidnapping.

This tactic of using the guerillas in Syria's confrontations with Arab regimes was, admittedly, not so evident in Jordan until Black September 1970. In Lebanon, however, it is was amply displayed in 1967 and again in 1969. During October 1967, in the period Syria was forcing al Fatah to look elsewhere for operational bases, a force of approximately 500 al Fatah guerillas entered Lebanon from Syria and besieged one of the main towns astride the guerilla corridor (the Arafat Trail) leading to the Arkoub. The Lebanese Army responded with armor and aircraft and soon after, with Nasser's intercession, arrived at a modus vivendi with the commandos. Nasser was quick to criticize the Baathists for their part in the affair, and Arafat, desirous of support from both Cairo and Beirut, tentatively heeded Lebanese restrictions. It may be recalled that guerilla operations from Lebanon did not escalate until 1968, when about 300-500 men were operating in the Arkoub.<sup>1</sup>

The second (and to this study more relevant) intrusion began, in a sense, with the Israeli assault on Beirut Airport on December 28, 1968, after which, in order to discourage Lebanese or Israeli attempts to terminate their operations, guerilla forces increased their number to about 1,000.<sup>2</sup> As expected the Lebanese took steps to tighten their control over the guerillas. A two month crisis developed in the spring when al Saiqa initiated violent demonstrations in the cities and attacks on police posts in the Arkoub. The guerillas were protesting government restrictions, at the same time trying to break the seal the Lebanese Army was putting on the Israeli and Syrian borders. The Lebanese were certain of Syrian complicity in the affair and army communiques asserted that some of the commandos were Syrian, and that Syrian helicopters were being used to supply them. In June, through the intercession of both Arafat, who had remained out of the fighting, and Nasser, who had attained renewed stature with his War of Attrition, pressure was placed variously on Syria and al Saiqa to withdraw the commandos. During the crisis they had been reinforced to possibly

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 1 November 1967.

<sup>2</sup>Al Saiqa had the largest number, followed by al Fatah and the PFLP. At this time al Saiqa had about 2,000 commandos in Jordan, and the remainder in Syria.

as many as 3,000 men.<sup>1</sup>

Commandos were again embroiled in fighting with Lebanese in October, but this time both al Saiqa and al Fatah were involved. Despite agreements made in the spring restricting guerillas to the Mt. Hermon area away from the more populated southern-central region, the groups were trying to expand their control in the south. The increased activity led to systematic Israeli retaliation, including artillery barrages, commando raids, and airstrikes in July, August, and October. The strike on 11 August was the first directed at a southern Lebanese settlement and, according to the Israelis, it was a response to 21 terrorist operations launched from the area in the previous month.<sup>2</sup> In October the Lebanese Army surrounded two villages the commandos were occupying and proceeded to disperse, capture or kill them. The action set off a two week round of fighting, which included al Fatah thrusts from Syria on three frontier posts, a 300 man strike from Syria on the border town of Yanta, and sporadic skirmishing throughout the country. In a determined show of force perhaps as many as 4,000 guerillas were moved from Jordan to Syria to provide a combat reserve for those fighting in Lebanon, and to put pressure for conciliation on the Lebanese government. This show of force was prompted by the fact that loss of operations in Lebanon might encourage a similar circumstance in Jordan.

On November 3 an agreement was reached in Cairo between Lebanon and the resistance, again through the intercession of Nasser. Though terms of the Cairo agreement were not disclosed it probably included a manpower ceiling of around 2,000, continuation of guerilla freedoms in the Arkoub, evacuation of villages along the supply corridor to the Arkoub, though use of the corridor was retained, and prohibitions on firing across the border. That the guerillas had taken control of the 15 refugee camps in Lebanon shortly after the accord suggests the consistency with which it was enforced.

Although the October confrontation was not initiated by Syria there is no doubt that Syria took a major part in its progression. The neo-Baathists had consistently tried to push Lebanese politics leftward through their own Baathist organization in the country. And when circumstances were considered

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 1, 2, 5, 8 May; 21 June 1969. Improved Israeli techniques to deter infiltration from Jordan also encouraged some movement to Lebanon.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 12, 13 August 1969. See also Jabber, "The Arab Regimes," p. 83.

unfavorable they did not hesitate to take punitive action against the Lebanese. This, indeed, was the Lebanese explanation for imposing a border tax on July 30, 1968 on Lebanese goods traveling through Syria.<sup>1</sup> During the guerilla crisis in October 1969 the Syrians employed similar economic pressure by shutting the border down entirely from October 21 to November 13. In addition to the closure, Syria assisted the guerillas with arms, transportation, and perhaps most importantly with free access over the border. While the Syrians assiduously denied the charges, Lebanon claims that they provided covering fire for guerilla penetration, and mass deployment of armor and artillery along the border. It is unlikely that Defense Minister Assad would have employed his forces in that manner since the disposition of strong PLA and guerilla forces along the Lebanese border precluded the necessity of weakening Syrian positions elsewhere. But heated denunciation of the Lebanese authorities aired by Damascus radio, and the accumulation of guerillas (possibly with artillery and mortar pieces) in the border areas, was, nevertheless, a considerable threat to Lebanon. There was some speculation too that al Saiqa and the Baathists were unhappy with terminating the conflict. This is somewhat corroborated by the fact that al Saiqa and the Lebanese again clashed on November 20, in the first serious incident after the agreement was signed. It is reasonable to assume that pressure from Assad's military wing of the party reinforced Nasser's efforts at getting the Syrian regime and al Saiqa to agree in the first place.<sup>2</sup>

Incidents in Lebanon at the beginning of 1970 caused al Saiqa more concern. Commando groups meeting in Amman accused the Lebanese Government of restricting the movement of some groups, while ignoring those of others. The reference was chiefly to the tightening of border controls between Lebanon and Syria. Since al Fatah depended more for support on the Lebanese refugee camps, al Saiqa felt border controls were directed specifically at it. An attack on an al Saiqa office by Lebanese townspeople January 15, and area wide demonstrations against the commandos, heightened their sensitivity. In reaction to the pressure on al Saiqa President Attassi warned in March that Syria would take

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<sup>1</sup>The border tax followed Syrian charges that Lebanon was harboring Syrians plotting against the Baathist regime. The New York Times, 4 August 1968.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 22, 24, 26, 27 October; 1, 4-6, 14, 21 November 1969.

firm action against "any attempts to suppress the Palestinian commando movement."<sup>1</sup>

### The PFLP

As stated above al Fatah had taken control of the PLO in February 1969, acquiring four of the eleven seats on the Executive Committee of the Palestine National Council. Al Saiqa in a move depicting a recent inclination to coordinate with al Fatah took part in the February PNC deliberations and gained two of the seats, making it the second most influential group in the organization. This conference was significant for another reason. The PFLP, which by this time had been weakened by the disaffection of Hawatmeh and Jibril, but which through daring and violent acts of international sabotage and hijacking had become surprisingly influential, boycotted this conference and the conference that followed six months later. Additionally, it refused to take part in the Palestine Armed Struggle Command established in 1969 to coordinate and discipline the various groups. In fact not until February 1970 did the PFLP join forces with al Fatah in a new Unified Command which offered little in addition to the still existing Armed Struggle Command.<sup>2</sup>

Syria criticized the PFLP not only for her association with the ANM, but also because of her unorthodox attitude towards the resistance. Its failure to coordinate its operations with al Fatah and al Saiqa had the effect of reducing any outside influence on it, especially influence from Arab governments. The notion that the PFLP could act with total disregard for Arab governments exasperated the Syrians and the Soviets, along with more conservative regimes. The hijacking of a TWA airliner to Syria in August 1969 (like the hijacking of an El Al jet to Algeria in 1968) embarrassed the leftist regime, which, in spite of propaganda, was concerned about Israeli reprisals. As a result the hijackers were interned for a prudent length of time, then released.<sup>3</sup>

In keeping with the on-again, off-again raiding from Syria the latter half of 1969 up to the Sinai cease-fire of July 1970 witnessed an increase in

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 12, 16 January; 9 March 1970.

<sup>2</sup>Hudron, "The Palestinian Arab Resistance Movement," p. 298; Amos, "The Palestinian Resistance Movement," p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Cooley, Green March, p. 149.



military confrontation coupled with measured use of guerilla penetration. Prior to December (as plausibly reported by the Israelis) the Syrian tactic was to first permit fedayeen to open fire; the Syrian Army would then join in only if Israeli forces returned the fire. In December the Syrian Army apparently began to initiate the exchanges themselves, probably in an attempt to share the prestige won by Nasser in his War of Attrition, or possibly at Nasser's behest. An Arab summit meeting was approaching and it is reasonable to assume that Syria could expect to wield more influence if she were actively engaging the enemy.<sup>1</sup> In 1970 the confrontations proliferated and included air battles, tank and artillery duels, commando strikes and sabotage. The escalation led to an Israeli air attack some 50 miles inside Syria in March, and an eight hour tank and air battle in April. Though the Syrians employed the guerillas for penetration, the level of infiltration came nowhere near that occurring on the Jordanian and Lebanese borders.<sup>2</sup>

### Black September

The most influential event in the history of the Palestinian resistance after the 1968 battle of Karameh was, for quite opposite reasons, the clash between the commandos and the Jordanian Army during August and September 1970. Syria's involvement in the confrontation is especially important for this study for it serves as both a prime example of the neo-Baath's relations with the resistance, as well as the denouement of their four and a half year old regime.

One should not overemphasize King Hussein's responsibility for the demise of the resistance in 1970. The stage had already been set by the UAR, and in some sense by Syria, when, at the end of July, Nasser accepted American Secretary of State Rogers' cease-fire plan ending a year and a half of controlled warfare at the Suez Canal. Though Syria had first rejected the plan,

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 9, 12 December 1969. It should be noted that from the end of 1968, but especially from April 1969, until July 1970 the UAR was embroiled in a costly war of commando raids, artillery duels, and air and counter-air battles to keep the Israelis from permanent entrenchment at the Suez Canal, with the intention of one day regaining the Sinai.

<sup>2</sup>In spite of restrictions imposed by the Cairo Agreement, by the end of this period the Lebanese border was as active as the Jordanian.

propagandizing for continued fighting, and though she was not an official party to it, she nonetheless abided by its terms. It of course remained to be seen whether Nasser could effect the return of the occupied Golan Heights--a primary objective of the Syrian regime. The Rogers plan, originally presented in June, purposely ignored the Golan Heights. Consequently Nasser was obliged to promise that a settlement would have to include its return.

Acceptance of the plan understandably caused consternation in the resistance, with the PFLP supported by Iraq rejecting it outright. Arafat had at first been cautious not to criticize Nasser personally for accepting the plan. Regardless, al Fatah radio facilities in Cairo were closed down because of the "attitude" the organization had taken regarding the cease-fire.<sup>1</sup> Nasser's message was clear. Cairo would not tolerate commando interference with her political maneuvering. Shortly thereafter anti-Nasser demonstrations were staged in Amman and Beirut. In addition fighting broke out in August between the PFLP and one of the two small Nasserite groups which challenged the PLO Central Committee's decision to condemn the cease-fire. Later in August both al Fatah and al Saiqa clashed with the Nasserites. Despite pressure on Syria to challenge the plan, her criticism of it went lame when Nasser announced that President Attassi had, at their June meeting in Libya, concurred with Nasser's intentions.<sup>2</sup>

The guerillas worked feverishly to maintain leverage lost when Nasser adopted this decidedly anti-Palestinian position. Syria assumed her normally belligerent posture, but nevertheless informed Nasser that she would accept an agreement which would return her lost territory. Some raiding was again permitted from Syria to reassure the commandos of her support. By her actions Syria intended to minimize the appearance that she was willing to accept an accommodation with Israel that would ignore the Palestine issue. It does, however, seem clear that Syria would have accepted such an accommodation, but it would have likely done little to decrease Syrian antagonism, or, for that matter, Syrian support for the Palestinians. The neo-Baath were too committed to exploiting Syria's twentieth century role as patron of pan-Arab nationalism to allow that to happen.

Guerilla activity also proceeded from Lebanon, but operations from Jordan

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 29 July 1970.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 21, 27, 29 July; 12, 13, 25, 31 August 1970.

became complicated by friction between the Army and the commandos. Fighting erupted between the two in May-June and again in August 1970, but on each occasion Hussein sought to appease the resistance, much to the dismay of his Bedouin troops. Only after a spectacular series of hijackings by the PFLP beginning on September 6 and ending a week later in Jordan with three airliners, hijackers, and hostages surrounded by the Army, did Hussein decide to put the government in military hands and push the commandos back to designated enclaves. Indeed, the seriousness of the hijacking incident prompted even the Syrians to request the release of the hostages.<sup>1</sup>

Hussein offered a compromise solution to Arafat concerning the disciplining of the PFLP, but it was rejected. As a result on September 17 the Army attacked guerilla strongholds in Amman and Zarqa and inflicted serious damage to the movement. Since the commandos were threatened with utter destruction two brigades of perhaps 250-300 T-34, T-54 and T-55 Soviet-made tanks, supplemented by artillery and armored cars moved into Jordan from their staging point at Dera, Syria. There was some confusion at first over whether this force was Syrian, as the Jordanians claimed, or wholly of the PLA, as the Palestinians and Syrians claimed. Though the force was probably in structure a PLA contingent, it was in fact supplemented by regular troops and materiel of the Syrian 28th Armored Brigade, which were quickly adorned with PLA markings. The 28th's orders, as Cooley relates, probably came from Jadid rather than Defense Minister Assad.<sup>2</sup> After three days of heavy fighting near the city of Irbid, Jordanian Hawker Hunter fighters joined in the attack on the armored formation. By September 23 after taking heavy casualties the Syrian units were withdrawn.

Syrian intervention in Jordan involved a number of considerations. First, the Syrian thrust was likely intended for limited military gains, i.e. securing the supply route passing through Ramtha to the guerilla strongholds in north-eastern Jordan. That the action could result in the overthrow of Hussein was a hoped for possibility, but primary concern was to secure a redoubt for the guerillas. Second, the Syrian action strained relations with her primary source

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 12, 13, 19 September 1970; Kerr, The Arab Cold War, p. 146. The PFLP hijackings were admittedly intended to prevent a political solution in the Arab-Israeli dispute.

<sup>2</sup>Green March, p. 116; see also The New York Times, 18-24 September 1970.

of arms, the Soviet Union. Even more threatening was the fact that US units had been alerted, and Israel was reportedly massing troops on her border with Jordan. Third, and most important for this discussion, command of the Syrian deployment was shifted from the Ministry of Defense to the Baath party. When Assad was supposedly ordered to participate by committing Syrian aircraft to protect the armored force, he refused. This was caused in part, no doubt, by the knowledge that Syrian airstrikes would have encouraged the involvement of the Israeli Air Force. But perhaps more importantly, Assad was in general opposed to shifting regular Syrian units from their positions opposite the Israeli Army (and from their primary task of deterring an Israeli attack). Surely he knew that combatting the battle tested Jordanians in strength sufficient enough to be successful would force Israeli intervention. Syria would then be exposed on two fronts, with two capable adversaries. Yet intercession with anything less would mean assured failure. A possible, though less likely additional reason for his refusal was that Assad intended that his rival, Jadid, fail in his venture. Assad thus purposely withheld his assistance to expedite Jadid's demise.

The fighting in September had not yet ended guerilla power in Jordan, though many of the smaller groups had been forced to dissolve or merge with the larger. Nevertheless, thousands had been killed, and scores had fled to Syria and Lebanon. The PLO found it prudent to move its headquarters to Damascus, and thus Arafat had to again rely primarily on the Syrian regime. An agreement signed by Arafat and Hussein on September 27 in Cairo permitted de facto guerilla control over the northeastern segment of the country including the communities of Irbid, Jarash, Ajlun, and Ramtha. A month later, in a clear indication of Jordan's intention of dealing firmly with both Syria and the resistance, Hussein appointed Wasfi al Tal as Premier, a man who four years earlier had been accused of plotting with Syrian exiles against the Baathist regime.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 29 October 1970; The Arab World Weekly, 10 March 1973.

## II. ASSAD TAKES OVER

The civil war in Jordan had serious effects on the domestic politics of Syria, mainly the intensification of already strained relations between military and civilian factions. In the face of strong pressure from Assad's group, President Attassi threatened to resign from his party and government posts but postponed any action until a party congress had a chance to review the situation. The two week congress concluded on November 13. Shortly after, Assad placed Attassi and Jadid under arrest, reportedly because the congress had decided to resolve the crisis by reducing his influence. Though the coup was bloodless Assad had deployed armored units around Arab commando camps in the Damascus area, hoping to prevent al Saiqa from rescuing the neo-Baath. It will be recalled that the Syrian Army was well under his control. As a followup Assad dismissed several leaders of al Saiqa (arresting some), and replaced them with regular army officers. He thus neutralized opposition from that quarter. In an effort to reassure the resistance, however, on November 16 he broadcast a pledge to support and help unify the commando movement.<sup>1</sup>

### Opposition to Jadid

Hafez al Assad was born of poor origins like most of his fellow Alawites in the Latakia area. And like most post independence generation officers he was politicized early in his career, adopting the pan-Arab sentiments of the Baath Party. In 1966 he supported the ascendancy of his fellow officer Salah al Jadid but soon became discomfited by the neo-Baath regime. Indeed, only months after the 1966 coup Assad was reported to have clashed with Jadid over the formation of a popular front regime, to which Jadid was firmly opposed.<sup>2</sup> Similarly Assad had been an advocate of cooperation among

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 24 October; 11, 15-17 November 1970.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 10 May 1966.

Arab states, regardless of ideology. To this end he supported a rapprochement with Iraq when the Iraqi branch of the Baath regained power there in July 1968. He was again opposed by Jadid but on this occasion he was powerful enough to have the issue brought before a Baath party congress in October 1968. In a sense his army partisans won in the struggle with party theorists when a compromise was worked out favoring Jadid's position on Iraq, but giving Assad nearly complete control of the cabinet. The party Presidium, however, still exercised ultimate authority over the government.

Assad also clashed with Jadid over commando activities, particularly after the June War. As mentioned before, following the war the regime had prohibited raids from Syria. According to Dana Adams Schmidt, in opposition to this policy Assad had encouraged both intensifying the raids and creating a Syrian commando group.<sup>1</sup> His pressure seems to have born fruit by 1969. Assad made a major bid for power in February and March of that year. After an increase in guerilla infiltration from Syria, Israeli aircraft on February 24 struck at commando bases near Damascus and shot down two MIG-17s. It was the first reprisal attack on Syria since the June War.<sup>2</sup> In apparent frustration over Jadid's refusal to conclude a viable defense pact with other potential Arab confrontation states, two days later Assad took control. The Israeli airstrike had been the dramatic excuse. Attassi and Jadid had reportedly been placed under house arrest. Rather than overthrow the regime, however, by the end of March he reached an understanding with his opponents whereby Syria would undertake closer relations with other Arab regimes (particularly Iraq), resist Soviet interference (although she would request more arms), and give fuller support to the commandos.

A number of significant changes in Syrian policy resulted: first, the radio warfare between Damascus and Baghdad was terminated, indeed, by April 6,000 Iraqi troops were stationed in Dera; second, cooperation leading to a unified command with Iraq and Jordan was begun; third, the Soviet Union began immediate delivery of MIG-21s; and fourth, in June Syria settled a feud with Saudi Arabia, lifted visa requirements for Arabs, and even allowed US newsmen

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<sup>1</sup>His dispatch from Beirut, The New York Times, 5 March 1969.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 24 February 1969. The fact that Assad sent MIG-17s against the far superior Israeli Mirage fighters was an apparent attempt to embarrass both the regime and the Soviet Union, and thus gain more modern armaments. In a similar move in May Assad sent his Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Mustafa Tlas to Peking for weapons.



access to the country, prohibited since the June War.<sup>1</sup>

As Air Force Commander and later Commander in Chief and Defense Minister, Assad was first and foremost conscious of the defense posture of Syria and in particular its vulnerability to Israeli attack. This vulnerability results from the fact that there are not one, but three plausible land invasion routes Israel could use. The one astride the Syrian-Israeli cease-fire line in the Golan is the most obvious, but from a military point of view for the Israelis it would be the most costly. Topographical features favor the defense, and Syrian forces are well armed and deployed in the area. The other two routes pass through neighboring Arab countries and enter in regions more favorable to an armored thrust, and are less well defended. One route would likely proceed past the Jordanian city of Irbid, and strike north on the Dera-Damascus road. It is no wonder then that Assad would welcome the stationing of two Iraqi brigades at Dera. The other invasion route would proceed north from Galilee through the al Bekaa Valley in Lebanon and enter Syria southwest and close to Homs. Deployments of Syrian contingents of PLA troops in Lebanon in 1976 seem somewhat affected by this possibility.

These strategic considerations shaped Assad's early relations with the commandos. He encouraged their recruitment and training but maintained that commando operations from Syria should be religiously supervised by his military staff. He realized that guerilla operations have their own intrinsic value, but that the decisive battle would be a conventional engagement better left in the hands of orthodox military men. Moreover, in view of Syria's geopolitical position, the decisive battle would be effected far more by the policies of the Arab states bordering Israel, then by the freedom of a few thousand guerillas. For this reason Assad was cautious in his support of the guerillas in Lebanon in October 1969, and of course in Jordan in September 1970.

#### Syria Shifts Policy

Reminiscent of his predecessor Assad appointed a Sunni as President, the unobtrusive former teacher Ahmad al Khatib. But with little effective opposition Assad took real control of the government. In an effort to broaden his support, and no doubt to neutralize the neo-Baathists, Assad permitted half of his

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 1-3, 16 March; 2 April; 18 May; 22 June 1969.

provisional cabinet to consist of heretofore excluded "progressive" elements, including Nasserites, Communists, and former Baathists. His restructuring of the Baath Party and employment of a national front coalition was finally being realized.

Only one day after the creation of the cabinet the Defense Minister of the UAR began talks with the new regime. This rapprochement signalled the end to a period of chilled relations going back to the 1961 breakup of a Syrian-Egyptian union. Though there were still a large number of anti-Nasser Baathists in positions of authority, Assad could more easily force them to accept his more flexible UAR policy because the object of their criticism was now gone from the scene (Nasser had died on September 28). At the same time the UAR, Libya, and the Sudan were developing a package for a tripartite union. In a remarkable change from past isolation Assad included Syria in the planning for that union, joining first in a defense alliance with the three.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, in order to mend fences with Saudi Arabia, he quickly moved to repair the Saudi oil pipeline transiting the southern part of the country, which had reportedly been destroyed by guerillas months previously. The neo-Baathists had pointedly refused to fix the damage. The Saudis had been unhappy with that fact, and more recently with Syria's intrusion in the Jordanian civil war.<sup>2</sup>

Understandably the Palestinian resistance was concerned about the turn of events. Earlier in the year the UAR had shown its willingness to subordinate guerilla interests to a political settlement with Israel. It was thus thought that closer relations between Assad and Nasser's replacement, Anwar al Sadat, could jeopardize Syrian support. Arafat, careful not to burn his bridges behind him, took a non-critical view of efforts at securing a peaceful solution with Israel and at unifying the major confrontation states. On his part Assad again tried to reassure the guerillas by insisting that the government would continue its support.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 19, 23, 28, November 1970. See also A.R. Kelidar, "Religion and State in Syria," Asian Affairs (February 1974), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report (Backgrounder), 19 March 1973.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 29 November 1970. As a result of additional strife in Jordan the Syrian government threatened to take action in the face of "plans to liquidate the Palestinian commando movement" there. The New York Times, 15 December 1970.

To be sure, that support continued for al Saiqa but with some serious qualifications after November 1970. There had been a great deal of friction between the commanders of al Saiqa and those of the Army. Assad solved the problem by purging the group of all its pro-Jadid elements and placing its operation squarely under the control of the Army, both political and military affairs included. The move forced it to adopt a more moderate line and in fact represent the unofficial view of the new regime. This dependence restricted the political role it would play in the resistance. Nevertheless, al Saiqa continued to be the object of solicitations by both moderate and radical groups; for while fortunes might bode ill for the more independent organizations, al Saiqa could always count on strong and consistent patronage.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Regime Legitimizes

From the time he assumed power Assad attempted to mold a popular image for himself by easing prices, cutting security restrictions, and as previously mentioned co-opting opposition parties. In February 1971 he established by decree the first Syrian Parliament in six years, and in March he was appointed President, formalizing the obvious. The National Front policy begun in November was repeated in March (and has been repeated ever since). As a result the Baathists retained only a slight majority in the Government.

Assad maneuvered to keep his political options open. In early February he was warmly received on his visit to the Kremlin, at which time he was likely encouraged to permit Sadat's peace moves to run their course. Syria had rejected the renewed efforts of mediator Gunnar Jarring but, nonetheless, had not rejected the possibility that Sadat's endeavors might indeed win back the Golan Heights.<sup>2</sup> One of his aims was the procurement of new weapons from the USSR and as a result of a military pact signed at the February visit, Syria received large numbers of aircraft, including MIG-21 fighters, and MI-8 helicopters.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The other regime sponsored group, Iraq's Arab Liberation Front (ALF), all but disappeared after Black September. It had suffered from Iraq's refusal to use her troops stationed in Jordan to assist the beleaguered commandos. An-Nahar Arab Report, 31 July 1972.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 2 February 1971; see also An-Nahar Arab Report, 5 June 1972.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 12 July 1971.

As early as April the countries of Syria, Libya, and the UAR officially announced their future union in the Federation of Arab Republics (FAR). By August a constitution for the union had been agreed upon and in September it was ratified. Two things about the FAR had specific relevance for the resistance. First, its constitution required that decisions on matters such as war be by unanimous agreement by the three Presidents. And second, in agreeing to the union, the leaders resolved to reject bargaining with the Israelis for compensation of the Palestinian refugees, or for the relinquishment of even "one inch" of occupied Arab territory.<sup>1</sup> Thus in considering the primacy of the Palestine problem the union had potential though unrealized advantages for the guerillas. Assad could theoretically prevent Sadat from concluding a unilateral accord (in which he was until 1974 quite successful). However, though Assad's attitude in the FAR might have provided some satisfaction, his general tightening of controls over the commandos exposed different emotions.

### The Palestinians Adjust

#### Commandos Lose Jordan

After the September clashes the guerillas' position in Jordan steadily deteriorated with the Army extending their control over most of the countryside, and guerilla numbers reduced to about 5,000 men. On taking power Assad had counted on improving relations with Jordan, but as a result of the renewed threat to the resistance he felt obligated to restrain King Hussein. No doubt pressure from the Baathists and from other "progressive" quarters encouraged him to take action. A verbal warning in December (previously cited) and a written communique in January gave Jordan notice that Syria might take action in defense of the guerillas. Syria did not intervene, however, after a series of early January clashes. Rather, in a somewhat unprecedented move on January 11, Assad offered to mediate to end the fighting and warned that a further deterioration would bring Syrian aid to the commandos. Presumably this facilitated the agreement signed January 15 which required Palestinian militias in municipalities to yield up their arms for storage in designated areas, in effect further weakening the resistance.<sup>2</sup> Syria's moderation and Jordan's strategic

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 2 September 1971.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 11, 12 January 1971; Jabber, "The Arab Regimes," p. 94.

advantages prompted Arafat to try to make the best of a bad situation; he consented to the agreement even though Habash of the PFLP was condemning it.<sup>1</sup>

Serious fighting again broke out in early April for a number of conflicting reasons but essentially because Jordanian troops were forcefully preventing the consolidation of commando control in the north near the Syrian border. In consonance with the move in the north, and as a reprisal for PFLP sabotage of a Jordanian oil pipeline, troops also besieged commando bases in the central sector. In a final maneuver the Army ringed Amman and threatened the guerillas with annihilation if they did not withdraw. The guerillas undertook an offensive of their own, hoping eventually to force Hussein to replace the man they perceived as the architect of the suppression of the guerillas--Premier Wasfi al Tal, along with a number of responsible officers. They of course lost and in another move to moderate the situation, and clearly with the intent of saving the guerillas, Syria sent a delegation headed by the Army Chief of Staff to mediate. They were able to bring about at least a temporary settlement by encouraging the commandos to agree to the evacuation of their enclaves in the capital.<sup>2</sup>

Even after the trouble in January Assad had tried to improve relations with Jordan, in part by evacuating al Saiqa troops from Amman well prior to the April agreement. Though in the April clashes guerillas had in a few cases struck Jordan from Syria, it was clear that Assad was trying to contain the fighting and develop a suitable agreement between the two sides. In a similar gesture after April Syria cut its assistance to the guerillas in the Ramtha region. Regardless, during the summer of 1971 relations became almost irreparable when Hussein's Army undertook an offensive virtually eliminating the guerilla presence in Jordan.

In early July the Army began a major operation intended to push the commandos out of their last remaining bases in the wooded Ajlun-Jarash region and theoretically into the Jordan valley area away from populated areas and thus exposed to Israeli strikes. Bitter fighting ensued and after three days Assad again sent a military delegation to mediate. In but a short time the Army had so successfully completed its operation that all but a few hundred guerillas

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 18 January 1971.

<sup>2</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 10 April 1971; The New York Times, 18 May 1971.



were dead, departed, or interned. Most escaped to Syria, with about 5,000 encamping in the vicinity of Dera. This time Jordan refused Syrian mediation which undoubtedly aggravated Assad and may have prompted border clashes in the latter part of the month. These included a number of commando and artillery attacks from Syria, which led to artillery responses from Jordan. Though the attacks from Syria were executed by the guerillas there is little doubt that they had Assad's approval. On July 26 Syria closed its border with Jordan. Additional border clashes took place in August but this time Syrian rather than commando units were engaging Jordanians. As a result of numerous incidents, on August 12 Syria closed her airspace to Jordan and severed diplomatic relations.<sup>1</sup>

While Assad permitted guerilla strikes on Jordan from Dera and possibly the use of Syrian artillery and tanks in cross-border duels, his response to the crushing of the resistance was markedly different from that of Jadid to Black September. Indeed it appears his action was largely a face saving gesture. None of his responses, including the closing of land and air corridors, were conclusive enough to save the guerillas. It should be remembered, however, that none of the other Arab regimes, in spite of their criticism of Hussein, did anything for the commandos' case except perhaps cut off their subsidies to Jordan. Adding to Assad's consternation, Syria was replaced by the UAR and Saudi Arabia as mediator. Collectively they cajoled both parties to meet in Jidda in the fall to iron out differences. By this time it was too late. The resistance had been barred from Jordan, and despite Assad's lukewarm efforts to maintain them there, they were even more dependent on Syria.

After the suppression of the resistance in Jordan in 1970 the commando military headquarters was shifted to Dera. The Syrian regime, however, had not lifted its restriction on operations. Any guerilla group desiring to launch an attack from the Golan had to obtain permission in advance from the Syrian General Command.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it appears guerillas needed a permit merely to pass between Arab countries and Syria. Again manifesting this control, in the summer of 1971 Syria confiscated a shipment of heavy arms consigned for al Fatah from

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23 July; 13, 14 August 1971.

<sup>2</sup>In a letter to the UN Secretary General, Israel stated that during 1971 and the first days of 1972 there had been 149 violations of the cease-fire from Syrian territory. UN Monthly Chronicle (February 1972). The violations appear to have been largely Army related. Few guerillas had actually been allowed to penetrate Israel.



Algeria. In explanation the authorities said that not only were these type weapons not suited for guerilla warfare, but that the arms had been shipped without prior approval from the Syrian government.<sup>1</sup> The implication is that the regime was determining both the level of violence to be employed by the guerillas, as well as the amount of arms Arab states could supply them. In contrast, the previous regime had put no restrictions on shipments. Coupled with the efforts to make al Saiqa the largest group numerically, Arafat rapidly cooled to the new regime.

Amplifying Arafat's suspicions the Army tightened its control over the PLA brigades stationed in Syria.<sup>2</sup> The friction between Arafat and Assad was particularly well illustrated in a series of events beginning on July 1971. At that time the PLA Chief of Staff Col. Haddad, who had been at odds with the Commander in Chief Brig. Gen. Yahia, began to purge the PLA of communist elements he accused of supplying arms to communist guerillas. There was little question that Haddad, supported by the Syrian authorities, was the real strongman in the Army. But Arafat, who was already concerned with Syria's interference and Haddad's efforts to keep the PLA above the PLO leadership, and undoubtedly pressured by leftist elements in the resistance, moved to get rid of him. In what seems an effort to placate both leftist and Syrian partisans, Arafat dismissed each of the officers and consolidated their jobs in the person of Brig. Gen. Misbah al Budeiri.<sup>3</sup> The appointment of Budeiri (who is still the commander of the PLA) was, no doubt, especially satisfying to the Syrians. A few years later Arafat tried to relieve him, but through the intercession of Syrian patrons he was reinstated. It seems somewhat significant that Budeiri's wife

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<sup>1</sup>The Arab World Weekly, 29 September 1973.

<sup>2</sup>In the wake of Black September all three brigades, totalling some 7,500 men, were deployed there. In the fall of 1971, however, the Ain Jalout unit was returned to the Suez Canal front. King Hussein accused Syria of forming a fourth brigade--the Yarmouk Brigade--composed largely of Palestinian deserters from the Jordanian Army. Al Fatah leaders had apparently called upon soldiers to desert and join the unit. By 1973 the Yarmouk Brigade included 5000 men. Though originally formed under al Fatah the Syrian Army soon exercised strict supervision over it. It is a regular force like the PLA units but is apparently separate from them. An-Nahar Arab Report (Backgrounder), 4 June 1973.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 3 July 1971; The Arab World Weekly, 4, 25 September; 2, 9 October 1971.

is the sister of the wife of Mustafa Tlas.<sup>1</sup>

Arafat's troubles were not limited to the PLA. The catastrophe in Jordan and the prospect of Egypt and Syria reaching a political accommodation with Israel without satisfying Palestinian demands caused anxiety in the movement.<sup>2</sup> After enjoying a remarkable degree of unity during the summer fighting in Jordan, by October the groups had divided into two disparate factions. The split was caused by disagreement over Arafat's willingness to discuss reconciliation with Hussein at Jidda. The radical organizations PFLP and PDFLP, and some independents on the Executive Committee of the PNC were violently opposed to any form of negotiations with Hussein. Al Fatah, on the other hand, was under strong pressure from Sadat, Faisal (his source of finance), and not too surprisingly Assad. Al Saiqa not only voted for attending the deliberations in Jidda but was represented on the delegation participating in them.<sup>3</sup>

As if this was not enough, on October 5, while on an inspection tour of the guerilla bases in southern Syria, an attempt on Arafat's life riddled his car with bullets, missing him but killing his driver. The perpetrators were thought to be guerillas opposed to the Jidda talks. Syrian authorities conducted investigations into the assassination attempt; they refused, however, to permit al Fatah to take part in them. The refusal understandably increased the tension between Arafat and the Syrian regime.<sup>4</sup> Two explanations for Syria's action seem pertinent. First, had al Fatah been permitted to seek justice for the attempt on Arafat's life it is not inconceivable that serious fighting would have broken out among the groups encamped in Syria; not only would the resistance movement be threatened, but in small part Syrian sovereignty as well. Second, Syria was again teaching Arafat the vulnerability of his leadership; in so doing she provided additional pressure for an accommodation with Jordan.

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<sup>1</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 25 February 1976.

<sup>2</sup>On September 1, in the same referendum considering the question of joining the FAR, Egyptians voted to change their country's name to the Arab Republic of Egypt (ARE); hereafter we will refer to it as Egypt.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 18 July; 9 September; 10 October 1971. If the deadlock was not broken with Hussein, Syria would be obligated to prolong closing the border with Jordan, a problem reportedly becoming as inconvenient for Syria as for Jordan. The Arab World Weekly, 2 October 1971.

<sup>4</sup>L'Orient-Le Jour as cited in The Arab World Weekly (Chronology), 9 October 1971; The New York Times, 10 October 1971.

### Commandos Shift Strategy

In the year following Black September, rapidly declining fortunes prompted the guerillas to consider major adjustments in their strategy. Not only were commando activities curtailed in Jordan, but Lebanon had reapplied pressure on the movement, and as a result had, during the summer of 1971, extracted assurance that the guerillas would restrict their staging areas to the Arkoub. Al Saiqa activity in southern Lebanon was causing strained relations between Lebanon and Syria. By the beginning of 1972, however, the two countries resolved to improve relations, which meant restraining al Saiqa. Additionally, the two primary financiers of the resistance, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, were curtailing contributions, partly in frustration over the influence of leftist elements on the PLO, and partly with the knowledge that since the movement's exclusive reliance on military measures was proving unsuccessful (and was indeed poisoning alternate efforts at an accommodation) it must be forced to include diplomacy in its efforts at regaining Palestine--in short assuming a posture of fight and talk.<sup>1</sup> The new resistance strategy took them from their more traditional military oriented targeting and tactics, to a program of irregular urban warfare and international terror.<sup>2</sup> The PFLP had from the beginning pressed for this type of operation and had itself carried out numerous attacks, especially in Gaza. But the unique point now was that all the groups, while not necessarily admitting participation in the attacks on civilian and international targets, were nonetheless experiencing and encouraging the benefits. Al Fatah, al Saiqa and the PLO, for instance all denied any responsibility for the PFLP's operations, or those of the newest terror group the Black September Organization (BSO), yet each enjoyed improved morale following the publication of their attacks. The resistance leaders were in general satisfied with the political assassinations (e.g. Jordanian Premier Wasfi al Tal on November 28, 1971 by the BSO), the letter and parcel bomb campaign in 1971 and 1972, terrorist attacks and hijackings (e.g. Lydda airport massacre May 1972 by the PFLP, and the Munich Olympics attack September 1972 by the BSO), the underground warfare

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 28 November 1971; The Arab World Weekly, 15 January 1972.

<sup>2</sup>On August 22 the pro-commando newspaper al Liwa claimed that the resistance had gone "underground." The Arab World Weekly (Chronology), 28 August 1971; see also The New York Times, 22 November 1971.

between Palestinian and Israeli agents, and sabotage of Western firms dealing with Israel (e.g. in Italy, Holland, and Germany by the PFLP).

The change-over to increased and seemingly indiscriminate violence has been sometimes attributed to the feeling of sheer desperation within the movement--leading to the mistaken notion that the resistance was on its way to extinction.<sup>1</sup> This judgement was clearly premature. Even at its low point following its demise in Jordan the resistance had from 7,000 to 10,000 guerillas active, operational bases in Syria and Lebanon, political offices throughout the world, and at least one Arab government willing to provide enough support to maintain it as a putative force in the Arab-Israeli dispute. The movement simply was not going to fade away. The shift to terror actually reflected a decision to emphasize an alternative often exercised by the PFLP and the PFLP-GC, and one which after the June War and improved Israeli border defenses became increasingly more popular with al Fatah as well. That alternative provided for the inclusion of civilian populations as legitimate targets for the resistance.

Of related interest to this study is the relationship of the BSO, Arafat, and al Fatah. The BSO is known to have consisted of former al Fatah men, but whether it was actually an extension of the group is still a bit unclear though evidence seems to favor the conclusion that it was. At the time of its activity there was some thought, especially by the Israelis, that it was a secret branch of al Fatah and thus receiving direction from al Fatah leadership. If so, Arafat had the enviable position of being capable of having his cake and eating it too, i.e. of experiencing the positive effects of BSO operations and mollifying the activist wing of the movement but at the same time, in order to placate Arab regimes and further legitimize his movement, denying any responsibility for it. One ironic fact that does suggest al Fatah's culpability is that the radical groups have attacked the BSO as "adventurist."<sup>2</sup> This is not too surprising considering that the BSO operations seem to have co-opted a tactic heretofore the province of the "progressive" organizations. Al Fatah, no doubt,

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<sup>1</sup>Such an opinion is expressed in The Institute for the Study of Conflict, "Since Jordan: The Palestinian Fedayeen," Conflict Studies 38, September 1973.

<sup>2</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report (Background), 29 May 1972.

was encouraged to steal some of the PFLP's thunder.<sup>1</sup>

Syria's reaction to the war on civilians was generally negative. Al Saiqa, for example, was especially critical of the BSO. Its position in Lebanon was already quite tenuous and it feared that BSO terror might prompt Arab governments to force even further restrictions on guerilla activities. Since the BSO was thoroughly secret it, like the PFLP, became less controllable. Arafat officially cut himself off from its operations, which meant that pressure applied on him might have little if any effect on the organization. This probably caused some anxious moments for Assad. Given Syria's history of support for the resistance it was extremely difficult for her to condemn a terrorist operation and as a result she unwittingly shared in any guilt assigned.<sup>2</sup> In showing the guilt she was undoubtedly subject to Israeli retaliation.

Though Syria's reaction to the shift in strategy was largely negative there is, nevertheless, some reason for ambivalence in their attitude. The Israeli response to the terrorism has often been (like swatting a fly with a hammer) many times more destructive than its cause. As a result Syria has gained by Israel's lost international stature, especially at the United Nations.

#### Lebanon Tightens Controls

As a result of agreements reached in the summer of 1971, and efforts by the Lebanese Army to repossess some areas occupied by guerillas, resistance activity from that country was unusually light. Only at the end of the year when the guerillas reasserted their rights (guaranteed by the 1969 Cairo agreement) to attack Israel from Lebanon did the situation intensify.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, Israel transmitted warnings to the Lebanese to curtail guerilla operations or

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<sup>1</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 17 October 1972.

<sup>2</sup>Following the Munich incident Syria tried to minimize anti-Arab publicity by accusing officials of the Federal Republic of Germany of tricking the guerillas and of thus being responsible for the subsequent bloodshed. She did not criticize the guerillas. The New York Times, 8 September 1972.

<sup>3</sup>By this time all the commando leaders were residing in Lebanon where they had established unofficial offices. Moreover, al Saiqa reportedly moved large numbers of guerillas into the Arkoub at the end of the year "as part of the commando mobilization at termination of the 'year of decision.'" The Arab World Weekly, 8 January 1972.

suffer the consequences of the first of a series of Israeli raids into Lebanese territory; the last strike on Lebanon had been 11 months previously. As a result shortly after the attack Assad assured Lebanese officials of Syrian support. No doubt an increased number of guerilla raids from Syria during the month was intended to take some of the heat off Lebanon, and by doing so ensure a guerilla presence there. For her efforts Syria herself was struck by an Israeli airstrike on the guerilla bases north of Dera. The January 24 attack was the first bombing in Syria in 19 months. Claiming additional guerilla attacks Israel undertook its largest action ever against Lebanon from February 25-28. The attackers employed aircraft, tanks, and artillery and included in their sweep both Palestinian and Lebanese communities. On February 29 Israeli aircraft again hit guerilla bases in Syria.<sup>1</sup>

Israeli reprisals, while not curbing incidents like the Lydda (Lod) massacre, were effective in cutting down cross border activity. Following the February operation Lebanese forces moved into the Arkoub and occupied guerilla positions. On March 3 the PLO Executive Committee decided to avoid a confrontation with Lebanon and agreed to a "strategy of mobility." This was a euphemism intended to explain their surrender of fixed positions to the Lebanese Army. Syria again preferred not to push the Lebanese situation too far. As evidence Zuheir Mohsen, the leader of al Saiqa (as well as the head of the Military Department of the PLO), suggested that the guerillas were willing to accept a reaffirmation of the Army's position. Moreover, guerilla activity from Syria seems again to have been sharply reduced, lasting until the fall.<sup>2</sup>

In June 1972 Israel carried out a number of additional strikes on Lebanon, prompted by the rocketing of an Israeli bus (possibly by the PFLP-GC). As a result a new accord was reached between Lebanon and the guerillas freezing operations from Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> The agreement reportedly had Assad's approval. Indeed, as An-Nahar reported it the agreement to freeze operations was reached after Arafat had gained Assad's assurance that he would be supported in his attempt to take full control over the resistance in Lebanon, including control over

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<sup>1</sup>The Arab World Weekly, 15 January 1972; The New York Times, 26-29 February; 1 March 1972.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 1, 4 March 1972.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 29, 30 June 1972.



al Saiqa.<sup>1</sup> Syria of course could always back out of the deal, but for the time being at least Assad opted for moderation. It was certainly to his advantage to support Arafat against the activists. Assad had been quite satisfied with Lebanese President Franjieh's relatively tolerant attitude towards the Palestinians, and did not want to encourage rightist pressure on him. As it was, Franjieh was on several occasions willing to permit things to "blow over" without taking decisive action against the guerillas in the Arkoub. If Arafat had forced a showdown, Franjieh would have had no choice but to act firmly. Thus, Assad once more made it evident that while maintaining at least a bottom line of guerilla power in a peripheral Arab state, he would give primary consideration to strategic military considerations and consequently to relations with host governments.<sup>2</sup>

Border activity seems to have been curtailed as a result of the new accord in June, but regardless, in response to a number of incidents culminating in the Munich massacre in September, guerilla bases and refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria were attacked by Israeli forces on September 7 and 8. Again the Lebanese forces responded by tightening control on the guerillas, forcing Arafat to agree to withdraw personnel from Lebanese villages and reduce his forces in the Arkoub. An opposition faction within al Fatah had refused to obey an Army order to vacate a port area. In Arafat's successful bid to discipline the faction three guerillas were killed.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile Syria lifted restrictions on the commandos in order to employ them in what some correspondents were calling Syria's War of Attrition. Though Lebanon's renewed pressure on the guerillas was coincidental with the increased fighting on the Golan in the fall of 1972, Syria's move to enlist the guerilla efforts seems in large part unrelated.

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<sup>1</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report, 3 July 1972. Al Saiqa apparently balked at the idea until Arafat convinced Assad to pressure the group to accept. The Arab World Weekly, 1 July 1972.

<sup>2</sup>It is significant that on a visit to Kuwait in April 1972, intended to secure conservative patronage, Assad said that the commando movement was a secondary force and that the main burden must be undertaken by the regular armies, especially those of Egypt and Syria. The Arab World Weekly, 13 May 1972.

<sup>3</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 17 October 1972; The New York Times, 20 October 1972.

### The Syrian War of Attrition

Up to September 1972 harassment, conducted at a controlled low level by the Syrian Army, had continued on the Golan Heights. Guerilla raiding in the area was limited to a brief series in January and February, a four month lull, and another few incidents in June.<sup>1</sup> Following the June 21 attack on southern Lebanon in which five Syrian officers were abducted, tensions along the Syrian-Israeli cease-fire line increased significantly.<sup>2</sup> But operations seemed to be limited to regular forces firing mortar and artillery shells.

The political climate was, however, changing rapidly. In mid-July Sadat ordered the withdrawal of from 15,000-20,000 Soviet advisors and combat troops. The move was the result of a number of irritations, but chiefly because of Soviet restrictions on arms deliveries to Egypt. Syrian-Soviet relations had themselves been tentative. In April Iraq and the USSR signed a 15 year treaty of friendship; Syria refused to follow suit. There was some concern that the Soviets were exploiting the situation of no war, no peace. Assad was determined to withhold a formal treaty as leverage to move the Soviets into a confrontation posture.<sup>3</sup> The tactic seemed to work as indicated by two developments. First, a visit to Damascus by Soviet Defense Minister Andrei Grechko in May, and a visit by Assad to Moscow in early July secured an arms and economic agreement totaling \$700 million, without insistence on a treaty of friendship.<sup>4</sup> And second, the USSR Middle East policy in general pursued a more aggressive tack in the latter half of 1972. In particular, there was an improvement in relations with the moderate guerilla groups, keying on an agreement reached during Arafat's

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<sup>1</sup>Israel's UN representative Yosef Tekoah described Syria's tactic, saying: "The Syrian cease-fire line remained relatively calm because the Syrian authorities, fully in control of the terror organizations on Syrian soil, preferred that they operate from neighboring Lebanon." UN Monthly Chronicle (June 1972), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Curiously, the officers were being escorted at the front by Lebanese counterparts; all had inconveniently stumbled upon an Israel raid in progress. The Israelis had for months refused to release them.

<sup>3</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 12 August 1972. Syria still has not concluded a formal treaty with the USSR.

<sup>4</sup>The Arab World Weekly, 8 July; 9 September 1972; US officials claimed that the Soviet-Syrian arrangement traded permission for Soviet naval facilities in the ports of Latakia and Tartus for advanced SAMS (SA-3s) and fighters to Syria. The New York Times, 14 September 1972.

rather warm visit to Moscow in October 1971. The agreement committed the USSR to train al Fatah guerillas, and provide hospitalization to those seriously injured in combat. In extension of that agreement the USSR both encouraged communist parties in the Middle East to participate in the guerilla movement, and in September began direct shipment of arms to al Fatah.<sup>1</sup>

Egypt's trouble with the USSR put Syria in somewhat of a dilemma. Since Assad had refused to expel his Soviet advisors he was obliged to prove the value of concessions made to the USSR. He wanted to continue close relations with the Soviets (without whom he would be naked before Israel) and the Egyptians (who along with the third member of the FAR--Libya--were critical of his continued attachment to the USSR). Syria opted for increased assistance from the USSR, rather than Arab unity and the FAR. Though at first she attempted to mediate the Moscow-Cairo rift, the realization that the US was not responding to Egypt's desovietization by forcing Israel to make required concessions assured Assad that Sadat's efforts would only prolong the Arab-Israeli confrontation. Accordingly, Syria undertook a diplomatic and limited military campaign to undercut Egypt's plans for a negotiated settlement, prove the value of her Soviet patron, and signal Tel Aviv that the departure of Soviet personnel from Egypt would not appreciably alter the situation.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of August Damascus-Cairo ties were seriously strained. It was at this time that Syria launched her campaign. She improved relations with the leftist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and concluded additional protocols with the USSR. More importantly for this study, in a significant departure from the past she lifted restrictions on guerilla raiding from Syria, as well as censorship on commando publications.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, according to one report the guerillas were permitted to carry out strikes without informing

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 1 January 1972; The Arab World Weekly, 1 July 1972. The Soviets counseled their parties against supporting radical guerillas and tactics, criticizing the PFLP and airplane hijackings in particular. They wanted the Palestinians to form a coherent political movement. The New York Times, 30 June 1972; see also Cooley, Green March, p. 171; arms shipments were reported in The New York Times, 18, 22 September 1972.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 4 September 1972; The Arab World Weekly, 9 September 1972.

<sup>3</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report, 28 August 1972.

Syrian intelligence.<sup>1</sup> Consistent with this development al Saiqa was taking a harder line within the resistance, and the PLO was criticizing Sadat for evicting the Soviets.

Assad's intentions were complicated by the fact that the attack on Israeli athletes at Munich on September 4 led to the heaviest airstrike on Syria since the June War. It is highly doubtful that the Syrians were aware of the BSO's plans in Munich, but having only a few days earlier lifted restrictions on the commandos, Syria gave Israel ample justification for her action. Since Syria had so irrevocably committed herself to protecting the Palestinians (and being somewhat encouraged by the Soviets, who intended to embarrass Egypt), she responded to the Israeli attack with similar military measures, beginning her own War of Attrition.

The military conflict continued into January 1973. Guerilla participation consisted of sabotage, ambushes, and mortar and rocket fire. In effect the war became a circular series of guerilla incidents, Israeli reprisals, and Syrian counter-reprisals. Little damage was inflicted by the guerillas, but it was nonetheless enough for Israel to launch her reprisals on Syria.<sup>2</sup>

In Assad's singlehanded attempt to fend off Israel's campaign against the guerillas he moved closer to the conservative Arab regimes to secure money to finance his confrontation. This policy was in stark contrast to the neo-Baath regime's refusal to accept oil (thus imperialist) money.<sup>3</sup>

Even more strikingly, in view of his tentative overtures to leftist regimes in September, on November 30 it was announced that the border with Jordan would be opened the following day. The announcement no doubt shocked the resistance, but Assad defended his action saying it was necessary to cope

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<sup>1</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report, 28 August; 18 September 1972. One can assume, however, that since military intelligence had infiltrated commando organizations permitted in Syria, it was unlikely that any operations could be carried out without its knowledge.

<sup>2</sup>Israeli aircraft bombed Syria on September 8, engaged in dogfights September 9, bombed again September 16, October 15, 29 and 30 (the latter appears to be the first attack on Army rather than on guerilla targets--it reflected a new policy of holding the Syrian military directly responsible for escalation of guerilla activity), attacked Syria and fought defending MIGs on November 9, 21 and 22. They bombed again on December 27 and 30, with air battles January 2 and 8.

Of the 43 Syrian planes Israel claims to have downed from the June War to January 1972, half would have been lost during this period. The New York Times, 9 January 1973.

<sup>3</sup>The Arab World Weekly, 18 November 1972.

with the increased threat from Israel. He took the move in view of the fact that a mid-November meeting of the Arab foreign and defense ministers was unable to resolve the dispute between Jordan and the resistance movement.<sup>1</sup> Assad and his military staff were clearly alarmed at the prospect of facing Israel alone, and hence were unwilling to wait for a mutually acceptable rapprochement between the guerillas and Hussein. He thus moved to reinstitute a unified eastern front.

Assad's action was an indication that his initially modest attempt to break the diplomatic stalemate had gotten far out of hand. The particularly destructive reprisal raids of November 21 and January 8 had convinced him that his inability to control border activity, coupled with his pledge to retaliate for attacks on commando bases, might lead to insufferable consequences. Making matters worse, Israel had been attacking guerilla strongholds in Lebanon as well. In response the Lebanese Army had again enforced its ban on guerilla presence in southern Lebanon.

The overture to Jordan was a signal to the resistance that some compromising would have to be made. Nonetheless military and guerilla provocations on the Golan continued, caused no doubt by Syria's compelling desire to spoil any chances of bargaining between Egypt or Jordan with Israel, as well as a need to quell internal dissent by maintaining a popular belligerent position.

Both military and guerilla provocations had ended by February, however, for two probable reasons. First and foremost, at that time the Government-controlled Parliament approved a new constitution to be submitted for plebiscite in March, which omitted a statement making Islam the official religion of the country. The attempt to secularize the state was opposed by the Sunni population who, in addition to religious concerns, saw the incident as a manifestation of political dominance by the minority Alawite sect. Violent demonstrations broke out which moved the Government to include a constitutional provision requiring the President to be Muslim. Additional religious rioting broke out in March and April adding to the regime's perception that a conspiracy was being hatched by Syrian exiles. In order to free needed security forces, and to reduce Israel's temptation to exploit Syria's domestic unrest, hostilities

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 1 December 1972; The Arab World Weekly, 2 December 1972. Assad may also have been concerned that his continued freeze on Jordan might drive Hussein even closer to the West.



on the Golan were terminated.<sup>1</sup>

The second reason for halting this War of Attrition is that though Egypt had not joined Syria by opening up the Suez front, she was nevertheless hardening her attitude towards negotiations. Failure of Rogers' attempts at proximity talks, student demonstrations in Cairo, the killing of two US officials at the Saudi embassy in Khartoum by the BSO and strong pressure by other Arab states, all contributed to this changed attitude. Convinced that an Egyptian-Israeli settlement would not be made Syria could better afford relaxing tensions on the Golan.

#### Al Fatah and Al Saiqa Feud

As a result of attempts by Arafat to minimize the effects of the prolific controls placed on the resistance by Syria, the two largest guerilla groups opened a serious rift in 1973. One of Arafat's attempts, which took place at the PNC meeting in January, was his consolidation of the PLO Executive Committee from 13 to 10 members.<sup>2</sup> The change reduced al Fatah membership from four to two, but likewise reduced al Saiqa from two to one. Since Arafat was likely guaranteed the support of an increased number of independents on the Committee, al Saiqa's influence was proportionally reduced. In a second and more obvious attempt Arafat moved at the same meeting to bring the PLA under de facto control of the PLO. His concern was that the PLA and al Saiqa were joining political forces to resist al Fatah's dominance of the movement. He was further irritated by the fact that the PLA was supporting Syria's attempts at securing a reconciliation with Jordan.<sup>3</sup>

Adding to Arafat's consternation Syria reimposed restrictions on the commandos after an Israeli airstrike on January 8 caused as many as 500 casualties. Reportedly the restrictions included removing guerilla bases within 15 kilometers

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 17 April 1973; see also Kelidar, "Religion and State in Syria," pp. 18-9. A constitutional move to secularize the state was first attempted in 1950, but it too met with severe opposition led primarily by the Muslim Brotherhood. Religious disturbances have not been uncommon in Syria.

<sup>2</sup>The Arab World Weekly, 13 January 1973; The New York Times, 13 January 1973.

<sup>3</sup>When Brig. Gen. Budeiri suggested a Palestinian-Jordanian reconciliation to the PNC he was enthusiastically heckled. The Arab World Weekly, 20 January 1973.



of the cease-fire line, guerilla evacuation of border villages, bases maintained at least five kilometers from Army positions or villages, and prior approval for combat operations. In addition Syria had apparently employed agents to incite villagers against the commandos to ensure compliance with the restrictions.<sup>1</sup>

In further manifestation of the trouble between al Fatah and al Saiqa in mid-February the latter suspended its membership in the Higher Committee for Palestinian Affairs in Lebanon, and the PLO Executive Committee, over an incident involving the shooting of a pro-Syrian Muslim leader in Lebanon by a former member of al Fatah. The declared suspension did not seem to alter its participation in future meetings however.<sup>2</sup>

#### New Crisis in Lebanon

While the conflict between the two groups remained Arafat could clearly not operate without a minimum of Syrian tolerance. On her part Syria was moved by the fact that Arafat was still the most influential Palestinian on the scene. When the battlefield again switched to Lebanon both were once more on operating terms. Nonetheless commando fortunes remained at their recent low. It seemed as though the entire Arab League was growing increasingly impatient with their continued disunity and random violence. Algeria, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia had all felt it prudent to reduce contributions to the movement. The Sudan almost severed relations entirely following the BSO attack on the Saudi embassy at Khartoum. She had at first accused the PLO of collaborating in the attack. And to make matters worse Jordan had been reintegrated into Arab military planning for the eastern front, without making accommodations to the resistance, at first thought a prerequisite for such a move.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 24 January 1973; An-Nahar Arab Report, 12 February; (Backgrounder), 4 June 1973. According to An-Nahar guerilla sources claimed that soon after the new restrictions were levied they began to filter back to their previous positions unopposed, suggesting a somewhat ambivalent attitude by the Syrians. Significantly though, Syria never had ruled out future operations.

<sup>2</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report, 26 February 1973.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 1 February; 19 March 1973; An-Nahar Arab Report, 12 February 1973. Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia (who had coincidentally pledged funds to Syria) were especially instrumental in rehabilitating Jordan.

### The Palestinian State

The combined opposition seemed best manifested in Tunisian President Bourguiba's July call for a Palestine state within the boundaries provided for in the 1947 UN Partition Plan. The trend toward encouraging a shift in the resistance from military to a purely political function had been adopted by an Arab head of state as early as September 1972 when Sadat offered to recognize (indeed patronize) a Palestinian government in exile.<sup>1</sup> But Bourguiba's attempt met with the same commando opposition given to Sadat's. Of interest to this study is the fact that Syria led the campaign to discredit the plan in alliance with the more radical groups in the resistance.<sup>2</sup> There are two reasons for Arafat to have disliked Syria's interference. First, establishing a government would require a heretofore unrealized level of unity with Arafat in charge. The smaller groups and regime sponsored groups (al Saiqa and the ALF) would thus be subordinated. Second, creating a legitimate representative government would theoretically provide greater leverage in confrontations with both Arab states and the Israelis and thus less dependence on Syria. The reality of the situation, however, convinced Arafat of its unfeasibility. Even a government in exile requires a sanctuary to function from. But despite conservative calls for creation of a government in exile, it was no more clear now than before whether Lebanon, Jordan, or even Syria would permit such a government to function from its territory, nor in fact was it certain that Israel or Jordan would relinquish territory for a Palestinian state. For their part the Syrians were convinced that the Egyptian and Tunisian plans were attempts to obtain a settlement at the expense of Palestine and Syria. By 1974 this sentiment would change.

### Syrian Intervention in Lebanon

Despite Syria's crackdown on the commandos in January, Assad was not ready to see the resistance driven from its sanctuary in Lebanon. As a result, in response to the worst fighting in Lebanon since 1969 between the Army and

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 1 October 1972. Sadat's tactic then was to neutralize Syria's attempt to use the resistance movement to prevent a political settlement.

<sup>2</sup>The Arab World Weekly (Chronology), 14 July 1973; see especially An-Nahar Arab Report, 16 July 1973.

the commandos, on May 3 Syria sent in a force of approximately 4,000 men of the Yarmouk Brigade. The fighting began the previous day and was caused by a series of Lebanese security measures and commando countermeasures going back to the April 10 Israeli commando raid in Beirut in which three guerilla leaders were assassinated. Shortly after the Brigade's intercession it was withdrawn in keeping with a quickly agreed to cease-fire. The cease-fire soon broke down and Lebanon responded with airstrikes on guerilla strongholds near the Syrian border. A force again moved in from Syria on May 8, this time consisting of both Brigade and commando personnel. At the same time Syria closed her border to commercial traffic from Lebanon, threatening additional measures if the Army did not terminate its attacks. After a third cease-fire the Brigade was on May 11 again withdrawn along with most of the additional guerillas.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the potential for violence in Lebanon Assad's intervention was characteristically restrained. Israel had struck a hard psychological blow when she carried off her raid in the heart of Beirut. Syria then feared that the particularly enthusiastic offensive by the Lebanese Army on May 2 was a manifestation of rightists' attempts to eliminate cause for future Israeli raids. Deployment of the Yarmouk Brigade was particularly well controlled, as they were committed primarily to give political elements, sympathetic with the commandos, enough time to cool Lebanese tempers.

Soon after the third cease-fire another of a long line of agreements was reached between Lebanon and the resistance. Although the agreement in reality had reflected the stalemate reached in combat, it nonetheless mollified those Lebanese sensitive about the utter lack of Lebanese authority in the 15 refugee camps. Though the terms of the agreement were not disclosed they were said to have brought the camps under Lebanese sovereignty, they in fact did nothing of the kind.<sup>2</sup>

Syria sustained her economic blockade of Lebanon until August 17 even though commando-Lebanese relations had somewhat normalized by June. This prolongation was chiefly intended to force Lebanon to grant a number of economic concessions, most important of which was the improvement of conditions of Syrian laborers in Lebanon. But of special interest is the fact that before the Syrian-Lebanese dispute was defined in economic terms it had involved the treatment of

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 3, 19 May 1973; The Arab World Weekly, 5, 12 May 1973; The Christian Science Monitor, 12 May 1973.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 23 May 1973.

the Lebanese Branch of the Baath party, alleged harassment of al Saiqa, Lebanese encouragement of Syrian expatriates and, curiously, the strategic defense of Syria.<sup>1</sup> The latter concern was exposed by rightist Lebanese who indicated in July that Syria demanded as a condition for opening the border the stationing of PLA forces in the Rasheiyah region of Lebanon, which in effect would block the al Bekaa Valley and protect Syria's western flank.<sup>2</sup> Though this reported demand was wholly consistent with Assad's strategic perceptions, it was not included in the final accord in August. On their part the Lebanese demanded and got certain undeclared guarantees concerning the guerillas, which may have been responsible for Syria's confiscation of arms shipments to the guerilla groups in July.<sup>3</sup>

#### Syria Prepares for War

The August agreement with Lebanon was caused partly by the same factors which led to the formal reconciliation of Syria, Egypt, and Jordan in September 1973. As early as the spring of that year Syria and Egypt had agreed to undertake joint military efforts to force physically or politically the return of Israeli occupied Arab territory. Since earlier political endeavors proved ineffective an effort was begun to include Jordan in a possible fourth Arab-Israeli war.

Reciprocal visits by a Jordanian envoy in June and by Syrian Defense Minister Tlas in August prepared for the tripartite summit in Cairo of Assad, Sadat, and Hussein on September 10 to 12. The resultant rapprochement not surprisingly caused a serious rift in the resistance movement. On the one hand the radical groups and to a lesser extent the PLO bitterly criticized Syria and Egypt for selling out the Palestinians. Hussein had persisted in prohibiting the commandos to return unless under Army control. The commandos of course felt that only Syria and Egypt could force him to recant, which in

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<sup>1</sup>A number of incidents in May and June created concern: an al Saiqa arms cache had been seized; Zuheir Mohsen was detained by police; four members of the Lebanese Baath had been arrested; and a Baathist was killed while police confiscated an arms cache belonging to the party. An-Nahar Arab Report, 11 June; 27 August 1973; The Arab World Weekly, 11, 16 June 1973.

<sup>2</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report, 11 June 1973.

<sup>3</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report, 24 September 1973.

the event they did not. Al Saiqa on the other hand cautiously supported the reconciliation. In an interview in an-Nahar on the opening day of the summit Zuheir Mohsen conveniently reflected Syria's own position explaining that "throughout history the entry of a people or a country into a real war with another has justified the suspension of difficulties or conflicts with a third party."<sup>1</sup>

Mohsen in addition exposed the long present and worsening crisis within the resistance by criticizing Arafat personally for seeking to transfer units of the PLA contingent in Syria to Iraq, and for channeling financial and medical aid to al Fatah and away from al Saiqa.<sup>2</sup> The first charge is especially interesting since such a move would effectively reduce a main source of Syrian leverage over the resistance. It is hardly likely that Arafat actually expected Syria, or for that matter the PLA, to abide by his order to transfer, but it did serve notice to Syria that Arafat might exercise his option of relying more heavily on the radicals and their chief patron, Iraq.

On their part the Syrians responded forcefully to criticism of Hussein's rehabilitation. On September 14 after an initial warning to tone down its criticism Syria closed down the commando radio station at Dera and arrested its operators. This was followed by the arrest of 16 guerillas for distributing an issue of the PLO weekly Filastine al Thawra which bitterly attacked Hussein. In addition Syria was reported to have blocked the Arafat Trail, and demanded removal of guerilla bases situated between the Lebanese frontier and Damascus. In response to Syrian censorship the Palestinian News Agency (WAFA) considered it prudent to suspend its publishing in Damascus.<sup>3</sup> Assad's response was uncharacteristically harsh and might in part be explained by the humiliating loss of eight MIGs in an air battle with Israeli aircraft off the Syrian coast on

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<sup>1</sup>Egypt and Syria restored diplomatic relations with Jordan on September 12, and October 4 respectively. The first practical consequence was that some Syrian forces were moved from the border with Jordan to the Golan.

Mohsen is quoted in "Arab Reports and Analysis," Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. III, No. 3 (Autumn 1973), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 16 September 1973; The Christian Science Monitor, 19 September 1973; The Arab World Weekly, 15 September 1973.

<sup>3</sup>The Arab World Weekly (Chronology), 22 September 1973; The New York Times 16, 20 September 1973; An-Nahar Arab Report, 24 September; 8 October 1973.



September 13.<sup>1</sup> The regime had little patience with criticism when it was the one shouldering the military burden. In addition Assad's restrictions were intended to caution the commandos not to attempt to sabotage the eastern front.

The Syrian actions apparently worked. A PLO executive meeting concluding on September 22 gave reluctant approval to the tripartite reconciliation, although continuing to criticize Hussein. In a meeting between Assad and Arafat on September 24 the President reaffirmed his complete support of the movement, and both men admitted that their differences had been exaggerated. Two days later the radio operators were released. As for al Saiqa, its spokesman Mohsen admitted differences of opinion with al Fatah but declared that they would be solved with argument and dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

Arafat clearly did not have much of an alternative. His position in both Lebanon and Syria depended on Syrian indulgence. While Iraq could offer some assistance she too levied conditions on the commandos, not to mention the fact that her closest border was 200 miles from Israel.<sup>3</sup> Assad likewise had ample reason to reduce the tension. In the very recent past he had significantly shifted policy towards the Arab moderates, to include: a surprisingly close relationship with Saudi Arabia, a controlled cooling in Syrian-Soviet relations, rapprochement with Jordan, criticism of Algeria, and a rather cordial August reception of Secretary General Kurt Waldheim (the first UN representative received in Syria since the June War). As a result the Syrian Communist Party threatened to resign from Assad's National Progressive Front. More

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<sup>1</sup>The Israelis claimed the battle was perpetrated by the Syrians. The Arabs, however, considered it an Israeli attack intended to display contempt for the tripartite rapprochement, and as a warning to Hussein not to become embroiled in a military confrontation the Arabs cannot win.

<sup>2</sup>Arab Report and Record, No. 18, 16-30 September 1973; see also The New York Times, 25 September 1973, and The Christian Science Monitor, 27 September 1973.

<sup>3</sup>In an effort to regain stature lost during Black September Iraq increasingly supported antipeace elements within the resistance beginning with Hawatmeh's Maoist PDFLP, and excluded al Fatah and other moderate groups. Just how tentative Iraq's support could be was illustrated in February 1974 when the Iraqi Political Committee for the Palestinian Revolution (established to provide the appearance of Palestinian control over Iraqi machinations) in effect shut down PDFLP operations in Iraq because it joined with al Fatah and al Saiqa in displaying a willingness to accept a political accommodation with Israel. Arab Report and Record, No. 4, 15-28 February 1974.



importantly in August the regime experienced two military attempts to overthrow it. Neither came to much but they did cause Assad to consider the fact that a crisis in Palestinian-Syrian relations could encourage the resistance to join leftist political parties and army factions to form an opposition coalition.<sup>1</sup>

Relations between Syria and the commandos had somewhat normalized by the time the Yom Kippur War broke out on October 6. While it appears unlikely that the guerillas had been informed in advance (secrecy was of paramount importance), they nevertheless did take part in the fighting. Accounts of their actions are somewhat hazy, but it is evident that they were involved in at least two areas. After the major battles began guerilla units moved into positions in southern Lebanon from which they fired mortars and Katyusha rockets on Israeli settlements, and launched occasional raids into northern Galilee. At the war's conclusion Premier Golda Meir claimed that during the war the guerillas had executed more than 100 attacks on frontier villages, causing 26 casualties. Israelis further claimed that in 202 armed encounters with the guerillas Israeli security had killed ten infiltrators and caught one.<sup>2</sup> In addition PLA and guerilla units fought alongside Syrian forces in the Golan Heights, reportedly helping Syrian Army commandos to seize an Israeli position at the top of Mt. Hermon. It is difficult to say how many were actually involved in the fighting, but it is certain that it was but a small part of their potential number.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Assad's domestic fears are related in An-Nahar Arab Report, 24 September 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Arab Report and Record, Nos. 19-20, 1-15, 16-31 October 1973; The New York Times, 12, 22, 25 October 1973; The Arab World Weekly, 20 October 1973.

<sup>3</sup>According to one somewhat sketchy source units of the Ain Jalout Brigade took part in the Sinai campaign. It was admitted, however, that it did so "in spite of the shortage in supplies, arms, and other kinds of support." Teyseer Kamleh, "The Palestine Liberation Army: Ten Years of Challenge," Arab Palestinian Resistance, Vol. 2 No. 3 (March 1975), pp. 35-6.

### III. THE ROAD TO GENEVA

In order to break six years of political stalemate Syria went along with Sadat's plan of coupling military thrusts designed to regain lost territory with a tenaciously applied Arab oil embargo. The embargo, it was thought, would compel the Americans to force the Israelis to either hastily accept a settlement which would permit the Arabs to keep regained territory, or withdraw from occupied Arab territory the Arabs might have otherwise been unable to win by military means. The strategy failed. The Egyptian Third Army had been trapped. And the Syrians had been forced to dig in at less defensible positions a short way from their capital. As a result on October 24 Syria accepted the UN Security Council Resolution 338 which called for an immediate cease-fire.<sup>1</sup>

Syria's acceptance of 338 was for other reasons a rather notable break with previous policy. The Resolution had repeated the provisions of UN Resolution 242 (1967), heretofore rejected by Syria, which called for Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab land, and establishment of secure and recognized borders.<sup>2</sup> In addition, by calling for immediate negotiations it became the source for the later Geneva deliberations.

Not until November 19, however, did Syria officially indicate her willingness to attend UN sponsored peace negotiations, although statements soon after the war's conclusion suggested this intention.<sup>3</sup> The Palestinian resistance was deliberating their participation in negotiations as well, no doubt influenced

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<sup>1</sup>Damascus was also heeding considerable pressure from the USSR, which included the abrupt halt of resupply operations at Latakia. An-Nahar Arab Report, 26 November 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Reportedly Syria had unofficially accepted the provisions of Resolution 242 during September in association with the tripartite talks in Cairo and Kurt Waldheim's visit to Damascus.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 12, 13, 20 November; An-Nahar Arab Report, 12 November 1973.

by strong pressures from several quarters to do so. Egypt and the USSR (the Soviets were extending a campaign begun months before) were urging Arafat to establish a government in exile, accept sovereignty over a partitioned Palestine (perhaps including the West Bank and Gaza Strip), and thus provide viable representation for Palestinian interests at future peace talks. Syria in contrast was at first opposed to the notion of a Palestinian government in exile, pushing instead for some kind of accommodation with Hussein.<sup>1</sup> She apparently favored a previously Egyptian position holding that since Israel would only deal with King Hussein, the King should secure the return of occupied territory and then grant the necessary concessions to the Palestinians.

The PLO itself could not agree to either accepting a government in exile or attending peace talks, even though it had been recognized as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people at the November 26-28 meeting of Arab heads of state at Algiers. The radical groups PFLP, PFLP-GC, Popular Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine (a breakaway group from the PFLP), and the ALF rejected outright a cease-fire, Resolution 338, and participation in any negotiations with Israel.<sup>2</sup> Supplemented by Libya and Iraq, this opposition became known as the Rejection Front. The largest groups of the PLO, al Fatah and al Saiqa, seemed more disposed toward participating in a peace conference, and accepting control over the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>3</sup> But they preferred a wait and see attitude on establishing a government in exile.

Complicating matters, on December 18 Syria reversed her November decision and announced that she would not take part in the peace talks at Geneva scheduled for December 21. The reversal was (rather obviously) a result of suspicions that the talks would have no significant advantages for Syria. She had been looking for indications of Israel's willingness to return some of the occupied territory. Accordingly, she perceived Israeli fortifications on the newly won territory as proof that Israel was not ready for concessions. It seems the

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<sup>1</sup>In early November both Assad and Franjieh were pressuring Arafat to begin a dialogue with Hussein.

<sup>2</sup>An-Nahar Arab Report, 12 November 1973.

<sup>3</sup>Zuheir Mohsen admitted the dilemma of setting up a state in the West Bank and Gaza. If on the one hand the PLO accepts these territories it might appear that claims for the rest of Palestine were being abrogated. On the other hand if it does not take quick action to secure these areas they may well be turned over to Jordan. The Arab World Weekly, 10 November 1973.

Syrian generals were particularly alarmed about entering negotiations without some prior guarantee that Israel would eventually withdraw. In sponsoring the Geneva talks the US and USSR had agreed that a Palestinian delegation would not then be invited but that the participants would decide in forum about Palestinian participation in future talks.<sup>1</sup> Had Palestinian interests been held foremost this fact itself could have been cause for Syria's action, but all indications are that it had nothing to do with it. Syria simply would not go to Geneva until Israel showed a willingness to withdraw from the Golan Heights.

Interestingly, the Syrian shift reinforced the Rejection Front within the PLO and moved the organization to oppose attending any future peace negotiations. Al Saiqa's actions were most predictable. Prior to Syria's December 18 announcement al Saiqa had remained relatively silent about the negotiations, though cautiously supporting them. Soon after the shift the group adopted an outspoken position calling for a "general mobilization of the Arab world against the Geneva conference and projects for capitulation to the Zionist enemy." It also rejected the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Even if Arafat had wanted to pursue the Egyptian-Soviet efforts at Geneva his opposition was now too strong. In a Central Committee meeting of the PLO, attendance at the peace talks was voted down nine to three.<sup>2</sup>

The relatively close cooperation between Syria and Egypt over the previous six months had been jeopardized first by Egypt's participation in the opening phase of Geneva peace negotiations December 21-22, and later by her January 18 acceptance of the Agreement on Disengagement of Forces. While Syria could be less concerned about resistance disposition before the Geneva meeting,<sup>3</sup> when that meeting exposed the apparent intention of Egypt and Israel to make bilateral arrangements, the Syrians found the resistance a needed ally.

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 29 November; 20 December 1973; 6 January 1974; The Arab World Weekly, 22 December 1973.

<sup>2</sup>The Arab World Weekly, 22 December 1973; quote from An-Nahar Arab Report, 31 December 1973.

<sup>3</sup>She was less concerned but not wholly unresponsive. As a condition for exchanging war prisoners she required Israel to give combatant status to guerillas captured in operations with the Syrians. The New York Times, 16 November 1973.

But other allies were also available. Iraq, encouraged by Syria's refusal to attend the December talks, was pressing for a military union with Syria. The Syrian Baathists, however, suspected a conspiracy and thus kept their distance. For the same reason the Soviet Union had been at first somewhat suspicious of Syrian intentions thus hesitant to rearm her.<sup>1</sup> Taking a more positive view in March the USSR promised to continue arms supplies. She was concerned lest American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger totally exclude her from the negotiations.

In mid-January Arafat, who was still trying to prevent a break with Egypt, largely disregarded the majority consensus in the PLO. In defiance of that policy, al Saiqa called an Executive Committee meeting for January 20 in Beirut while Arafat was abroad. That same day the Committee published a statement condemning the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement. On hearing this Arafat quickly denounced this statement of what he claimed was an illegally constituted forum.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of Arafat's efforts it was quite obvious that the commando leadership would not agree to support Egypt's plan, or indeed partake in Geneva negotiations, unless Syria had decided to do so.

The Syria-al Saiqa ploy with the PLO went handily with propaganda attacks from Damascus. As early as December the regime was publishing criticism of Sadat's strategy; by February it was threatening to dissolve all ties with Cairo.<sup>3</sup> Though al Saiqa had disagreed with Arafat over Egypt's policies she nonetheless joined with the PDFLP (now becoming a more frequent ally) and al Fatah in support of establishing a "national authority" over the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and a tiny enclave at the southern end of the Golan called al Hama.<sup>4</sup> Syria had apparently contributed to their decision by adjusting her view on commando relations with Jordan. It no doubt was further encouraged when on February 23 the participants of the Islamic Conference at Lahore, Pakistan reaffirmed the Algiers declaration stating that the PLO was "the sole

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 16 January 1974; Arab Report and Record, No. 5, 1-15 March 1974.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 23 January 1974; The Arab World Weekly, 26 January 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The Arab World Weekly, 2 February 1974. Accordingly, in March Defense Minister Tlas complained that Egypt's acceptance of the cease-fire in October had prevented a counterattack planned by Syria for October 23. Arab Report and Record, No. 5, 1-5 March 1974.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 11 February 1974.



legitimate representative of the Palestinian nation." The commando leaders, however, were postponing their decision to go to Geneva while waiting for assurances from the co-sponsors, the US and the USSR, that they would recognize the principle of a national Palestinian authority over formerly occupied territory.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Syrian-Israeli Disengagement

In his efforts to force Egypt, Israel, and the United States to consider Syrian interests in their negotiations Assad intensified the military confrontation at the Golan. Almost daily exchanges of tank, artillery and small arms fire occurred from early January 1974 until an agreement to disengage Syrian and Israeli troops was signed on May 31. Of special interest to this study is the close association between the Golan War's intensity and Assad's diplomatic fortunes. As an Israeli soldier suggested, one might have used Syrian shelling as a barometer of Assad's diplomatic successes.<sup>2</sup> For example, intense firing was first initiated in the week prior to the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement. More firing, and then a lull during Kissinger's concluding attempts to break the stalemate between Syria and Israel, preceded Kissinger's February 26 success in exchanging lists of POWs. And finally, daily clashes took place up until the disengagement accord was concluded. This latter fighting included major infantry operations designed to capture strategic and thus negotiable positions on Mt. Hermon.

More interesting, Syria's policy of fight and talk was being employed by the guerillas; possibly in coordination with Syrian military authorities. Infiltration from Lebanon was on the increase. Accordingly, Zuheir Mohsen referring to Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy stated that the present aim of the resistance was to disrupt attempts at a peace settlement.<sup>3</sup> A guerilla operation

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 24 February; 7 March 1974.

<sup>2</sup>As cited in The New York Times, 20 February 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The Arab World Weekly (Chronology), 6 April 1974. According to one report Syria had renewed its restriction on guerilla activity in her border areas. Arab Report and Record, No. 4, 15-28 February 1974. This would not be inconsistent with Assad's attempt to maintain absolute control over the level of conflict in the area. The Israelis admitted that the Syrian shelling seemed intentionally limited and off target, suggesting that while they wanted to keep the level of tension high, they did not want to bring on drastic reprisals. Relevant is the fact that Israel's long range artillery could cause damage close enough to be seen and heard from Damascus. The New York Times, 21 March 1974.



of especially serious consequence was the PFLP-GC attack on the Israeli border settlement of Kiryat Shmona on April 11 killing 15 Israelis. Though Israel accused Syria of culpability, it is quite unlikely she had any direct role in the incident.<sup>1</sup> This attack appeared to signal, however, an intention of several of the groups to intensify suicide-type operations inside Israel. That al Fatah (and possibly Syria) was included in those groups was suggested when the PDFLP sponsored a raid on a school at Maalot. The action eventually concluded with 25 Israelis dead. It is especially significant that this raid was carried out by a group who in the preceding three months had taken up a remarkably conservative line. Also significant is the fact that Kissinger was shuttling between Syria and Israel at the time. Speculation was that Hawatmeh, the PDFLP's leader, and Arafat had collaborated in the operation. Hawatmeh's statements after the raid that the Palestinians would be willing to go to Geneva, provided that Israel recognizes their "national rights," was certainly compatible with the sentiments of al Fatah and al Saiqa.<sup>2</sup> Syria's involvement in the raid is unclear, but two possibilities seem likely. First, Syria had no part in the operation. The PDFLP had intended to demonstrate to both Syria and Israel that the Palestinians had to be reckoned with in any agreement. Or second, Syria had collaborated in, or at least approved of the operation in order to enhance the power of her Palestinian allies and consequently enhance the importance of her ability to control them.

The latter possibility is admittedly weaker except for the fact that on May 23, in the week of final negotiations for the disengagement, eight PDFLP guerillas were intercepted while infiltrating from Syria. It is highly unlikely that the operation had been executed without Syrian knowledge or direction. That being the case Israel launched an air attack on Syrian front line positions the following day.<sup>3</sup> In a rather pragmatic approach to the

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<sup>1</sup>On April 15 Yosef Tekoah claimed before the UN Security Council that "the terrorist organization responsible for the Kiryat Shmona massacre was in a sense a para-military adjunct of the Syrian Baathist regime and the Syrian Army." UN Monthly Chronicle (May 1974), p. 15. Jibril did have an organization in Syria but it was surely not an extension of the Baathists.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 21 May 1974; see especially The Arab World Weekly, 25 May 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 24, 25 May 1974; The Arab World Weekly, 25 May 1974. Similar incidents would occur in October and November 1975.

situation Syria reportedly gave informal assurances to Kissinger (most likely soon after the PDFLP unit was intercepted) that she would curtail commando raiding into Israel.<sup>1</sup> This is even more interesting when contrasted with Syria's demand two months earlier that Israel recognize Palestinian national rights as a condition for the disengagement.<sup>2</sup> Once again it seems Syria subordinated the freedom of the commandos; in this case she did so for the return of Quneitra and its environs.

### Syria Encourages a Palestine State

Having secured at least a partial return of Syrian territory, Assad seemingly realized that bilateral negotiations had been wrung of all they were worth. Future Israeli concessions it was thought would be made only in terms of a multilateral agreement, but such an agreement would require considerably more pressure than the Syrians were able to generate by the Golan War. As a result the alliance with the Palestinians became even more attractive.

To allay Palestinian suspicions Syria announced that the agreement was only a first step in fulfillment of the two principles to which she was committed--the return of all Arab territory and the guarantee of Palestinian national rights.<sup>3</sup> In order to pursue these principles Syria reversed her policy of refusing to attend the Geneva negotiations; she urged the resistance to take part in them as well. Accordingly, at the June conference of the PNC al Saiqa recommended that the PLO go to Geneva.<sup>4</sup> Since both Egypt and Syria had now reached somewhat of an agreement on proceeding with multilateral peace talks the PLO could either agree to take part, or find itself cut off from two of

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<sup>1</sup>On the day preceding the accord Syrians and Palestinians both denied that Syria would guarantee curtailing fedayeen operations. Yet on the day of the signing sources at Geneva admitted that Assad had agreed orally to halting infiltration from Syria, no doubt prompted by Israeli insistence coupled with promises of US aid. The New York Times, 29, 30 May; 1 June 1974.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 29 March 1974. It should be noted that Kuwait was in large part financing the massive Soviet rearmament of Syria. Satisfying Kuwait's sympathy for the Palestinians was reason enough to represent the commandos' interests.

<sup>3</sup>The Arab World Weekly, 25 May 1974.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 1, 6 June 1974.

its major patrons.<sup>1</sup> The PNC in fact voted overwhelmingly to participate in Geneva, provided that the Palestine question was regarded in terms of "national rights" rather than as a "refugee problem." Additionally it agreed to create a "national authority" in any of the occupied territory relinquished by Israel. Equally significant was its mandate to the PLO requiring intensification of military operations inside Israel.<sup>2</sup> The resulting policy was remarkably similar to Syria's strategy of fight and talk.

Not surprisingly there was opposition from the Rejection Front, but by and large the moderates now strongly supported by Syria carried the day. That being the case, at the end of the month the PDFLP, which supported the PNC's decision to employ both political and military operations, violently clashed with the PFLP-GC, a proponent of purely military measures. Several guerillas were killed before PLO security (the Armed Struggle Command) could end the fighting.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after the PNC decided to intensify attacks on Israel several guerilla operations, most notably a PFLP-GC attack on Kibbutz Shamir killing three Israeli women, were carried out. After waiting for President Nixon to return from his visit to the Middle East, Israeli aircraft on June 18 and 20 bombed guerilla positions in Lebanon.<sup>4</sup> An additional guerilla attack on June 24 killed four Israelis in the village of Nahariya. The following day Israel renewed its artillery bombardment of guerilla posts in southern Lebanon. Of special interest is the fact that the Nahariya raid and a number of those before it were executed by al Fatah.<sup>5</sup>

Earlier in the year Arafat had given assurances to Lebanese officials that he would curb guerilla operations from Lebanon. He had trouble, however,

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<sup>1</sup>Immediately following the conference Arafat flew off to consult with Col. Qadhafi of Libya, no doubt in an effort to cover all bets.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 9, 10 June 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 29, 30 June 1974.

<sup>4</sup>The June disengagement expedited Assad's move towards the West. As an example, during Nixon's visit to the Middle East in June, he and Nixon agreed to resume diplomatic relations. The new American Ambassador Richard Murphy arrived in August, taking over operations previously conducted by an American interests office set up some months before. From 1974-75 US sales to Syria more than quintupled (to about \$150 million). The Christian Science Monitor, 26 June 1975.

<sup>5</sup>The New York Times, 26 June 1974.

getting the PFLP-GC to comply. As a consequence Israeli reprisals caused by PFLP-GC raids were increasing criticism in Lebanon, but this criticism was being directed more at the Army's inability to protect the country than at their failure to suppress the guerillas. Curiously, in mid-spring Israeli reprisals seem to have increased Lebanese sympathy for the resistance which was manifest in a "wedding of Lebanese and Palestinian blood."<sup>1</sup> No doubt the decision of the Algiers and Lahore conferences recognizing the PLO's representative authority, and the PNC's decision to (conditionally) participate at Geneva, put additional pressure on Lebanese authorities to accept the resistance movement. Arafat sensed this favorable climate and vigorously pursued the PNC's mandate of June.

The Israeli strikes in addition were bringing Lebanon unanticipated aid and status. On July 4 the Arab League voted to provide Lebanon and the PLO financial help to strengthen their defenses. Understandably, Lebanon turned down offers of troops from Egypt, Syria, Kuwait, and Algeria, anti-aircraft defenses for PLO use in the refugee camps, and a mobile network of SAMs from Syria.<sup>2</sup>

The benefits nonetheless did not compensate for the approximately 80 persons killed in the mid-June strikes.<sup>3</sup> Lebanese anxiety led to promises from Assad and Sadat to pressure the resistance to curtail their raiding, as well as a promise from Arafat himself to tighten up on former restrictions. Accordingly, Syria continued her restraints on commando activity, no doubt assisted by the presence of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Syrian-Israeli cease-fire line.<sup>4</sup>

Guerilla operations had been decreased, but not terminated. Additional strikes in the following months led to frequent (and often daily) reprisals by the Israelis. It is likely that these reprisals, coupled with heightened commando arrogance following from the June PNC conference, encouraged the July battles between the right wing Maronite Christian Phalangist party and guerillas

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 14 February; 13, 20 April 1974; quote from al-Hayat cited in The Arab World Weekly, 18 May 1974.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 5, 8 July 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 25 June 1974.

<sup>4</sup>The UNDOF, consisting of approximately 1,200 men, has remained on the line since the implementation of the disengagement on June 1, 1974.

from the Tal Zaatar refugee camp. The four days of fighting raised the distinct possibility that the 5,000 man militia of the Phalangist party, and the 1,000 man militia of the right wing Christian National Liberal party were preparing for a major confrontation with the guerillas. To reduce this risk the Lebanese Government, in a somewhat inadequate effort in September, canceled all civilian licenses to carry firearms.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Lebanon's cautious support of the movement, King Hussein was proving to be a major obstacle to resistance participation at a reconvened Geneva conference.<sup>2</sup> Complicating matters a mid-July communique, marking the end of a meeting between Sadat and Hussein in Alexandria, attempted to establish a principle for reconciling Jordan and the PLO, and preparing for the Geneva talks. The effort was, however, decidedly counterproductive for Sadat had agreed that the PLO was the legitimate representative of the Palestinians, with the important exception of those living in the Jordanian Kingdom. This left the discomfiting impression that Hussein would still be responsible for negotiating for Palestinians on the West Bank. The PLO thus claimed that Sadat was joining Hussein in an attempt to split the Palestine nation. Sadat later explained that he regarded the West Bank as being under Jordanian trust, but that once Israel had concluded a settlement with Jordan, the PLO would exercise control.<sup>3</sup>

Sadat's attempt at moderation had the effect of undercutting his liaison with Arafat. Strong criticism of him by the radicals, as well as al Saiqa, no doubt justified Arafat's own suspicions and criticism. A month after the communique Hussein flew to Washington to press for a US commitment to encourage Israel to conclude a bilateral settlement with Jordan.<sup>4</sup> Hussein was impatient to have his agreement before the PLO could use the coming Rabat conference to prevent it. Israel, however, was inclined to deal first with Egypt, and largely ignored the overtures. Hussein's actions likely intensified Syrian apprehensions

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 30 July 1974; 19 September 1974; The Arab World Weekly, 3 August 1974.

<sup>2</sup>Hussein had refused to personally attend the Algiers conference of the previous November because he disapproved of the creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. By May he had accepted the principle that the PLO was the sole representative of the Palestinians, but he still refused them unrestricted rights to negotiate the disposition of the West Bank. The New York Times, 26 November 1973; 2 May 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 21 July; 23 September 1974; The Arab World Weekly, 27 July 1974.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 18 August 1974.



about the step-by-step diplomacy. During the summer Syria's attitude about Hussein's involvement with the West Bank had been rather ambiguous. Assad's main concern had been the deteriorating relations between Egypt and the PLO. If viable multilateral negotiations were to be realized cooperation among Arab participants was mandatory. Therefore he reasoned that to save those relations more pressure might have to be directed at Hussein.

### Syria Turns to the PLO

Later in the year Syria vigorously supported the PLO's claim as national authority over the West Bank. This was part of her preparation for viable Geneva negotiations. In an effort to make the PLO more acceptable Syria took measures against the Rejection Front as early as July.<sup>1</sup> In September the PFLP withdrew from the Executive Committee of the PLO. The following month it denounced all efforts for a negotiated settlement and called for new Palestinian leadership. This action was ample justification for Syria to force the Front underground in October and November, thus making the PLO especially presentable for the November UN debate on the Mideast. On their part the Front seems to have been plotting against the regime with the supporters of Salah Jadid. And if al Saiqa is to be believed Habash was receiving large sums from Iraq to help finance the plot. Under these circumstances the regime jailed as many as 25 PFLP members.<sup>2</sup>

In adopting the Syrian strategy of fight and talk, the PLO was able to co-opt much of the support previously reserved for the Rejection Front. Operations from Lebanon and from inside Israel proliferated in November and December. Of special interest is an attack from Jordan on the Israeli settlement of Beit Shean November 19 which killed three Israelis. The PFLP admitted carrying out the raid with the authorization of the PLO.<sup>3</sup> The fact that it was launched from Jordan strongly suggests that Syria had a hand in its execution. The raiders likely transited Jordan from their staging base in Syria. Indeed, Syria may

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<sup>1</sup>According to some Iraqi sources the Syrian action included the arrest of PFLP-GC members, tightening border controls, and disapproval of a number of Maalot type raids. The New York Times, 26 July 1974.

<sup>2</sup>An-Nabhar Arab Report, 18 November 1974; The Arab World Weekly, 14 December 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 18 November; 19 December 1974.



have encouraged the attack in order to signal Hussein that Syria could still use the resistance to disrupt a bilateral Jordanian-Israeli settlement. More importantly, however, Syria meant to impress participants in the upcoming debate on the renewal of the UNDOF with the gravity of the border situation. This possibility is reinforced by the fact that at the same time Syria had been redeploying forces on the cease-fire front in hostile gestures which soon provoked a small-scale mobilization in Israel. Moreover, 20 arms carrying Soviet ships had recently unloaded at Latakia (reflecting the USSR's not inconsiderable increase in support to Syria).<sup>1</sup> One must, however, balance these hostile gestures against Syria's parallel efforts at moderation, the best example being Zuheir Mohsen's somewhat historic announcement in November that the resistance would be prepared to recognize Israel if she would withdraw to the boundaries allotted by the 1947 UN Partition Plan.<sup>2</sup>

#### PLO Success at Rabat and the UN

In her effort to win respectability for the PLO, Syria supported the organization's efforts to get the Palestine question entered on the agenda of the UN General Assembly. Assad and Arafat were intent on securing international recognition for the PLO in advance of the Geneva negotiations. PLO lobbying begun in August prompted the Arab League to decide on September 3 to sponsor the question as a separate agenda item. Consequently a request by all 20 Arab League members (plus 23 other countries) led to the General Assembly's decision of September 21 to hold a fullfledged debate on the "Palestinian question," and to its decision on October 14 to invite the PLO as "the representative of the Palestinian people" to participate in its deliberations on it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Observers noted that Syria's military preparation prior to the extension of the UNDOF was clearly defensive. In fact US sources indicated Assad had proposed the extension ten days before the deadline. The New York Times, 1 December 1974. With fair prospects for success at Geneva, a war at this time would have been somewhat unattractive.

Consistent with Syria's closer ties with al Fatah, in October Arafat opened the first military school for al Asifa (al Fatah's military arm) in Syria. Arab Report and Record, No. 19, 1-15 October 1974.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 29 November 1973; An-Nahar Arab Report (Chronology), 9 December 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 4, 16, 22 September 1974; UN Monthly Chronicle (November 1974).

Meanwhile the PLO was preparing for a confrontation with King Hussein at the conference of Arab heads of state at Rabat, Morocco. To the surprise of the organization, in an historic about-face Hussein declared on the day following the October 28 opening of the conference that he agreed with the concept of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. No doubt pressure, and a number of reassurances from Arab states, especially Syria and Saudi Arabia, swung him around. Syria had repeatedly called for a united military front in the days prior to the conference and had, it would seem, joined with Faisal to realize the plan. To finance it the conferees agreed to a four year program to provide annual payments of \$1 billion to Egypt and Syria each, \$300 million to Jordan, and \$50 million to the PLO.<sup>1</sup>

In supporting the PLO's right to negotiate for the Palestinians it seems the participants were heeding Syria's recent harsh criticism of Egypt's step-by-step approach. Syrian intentions were, however, only partly fulfilled at Rabat. Egypt had still refused to tie a pullback from the Sinai with one from the Golan. By December the rift between Syria and Egypt had grown acute largely as a result of US proposals for a second stage of disengagement in the Sinai. Assad feared that a partial withdrawal in the Sinai would have the effect of freezing troop dispositions and thus prohibit Syria from ever getting her land back diplomatically.<sup>2</sup> When Arafat finally made his appearance at the UN on November 13 Syria was being cast as the PLO's chief advocate, a role she would play henceforth.<sup>3</sup>

A proliferation of guerilla raids on Israel after Arafat's UN speech was

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 24, 29 October 1974.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 18 December 1974. By August Sadat had recanted his untimely agreement with Hussein in July, and enthusiastically supported efforts to legitimize the PLO. His negotiations with Kissinger, however, were preventing the reestablishment of the kind of relationship with the moderates he enjoyed in the first half of the year.

<sup>3</sup>The content of Arafat's speech at the UN was of little import, however two subsequent General Assembly resolutions, Nos. 3236 and 3237 were. The first reaffirmed Palestinian rights to self-determination and national sovereignty, but in a significant departure from previous motions it did not mention rights of all states in the Middle East to secure and recognized boundaries. The second resolution invited the PLO to participate as an observer at General Assembly functions and at all international conferences convened under the auspices of any organs of the UN. UN Monthly Chronicle (December 1974), pp. 36-7.

likely intended to discourage any appearance of softness.<sup>1</sup> But the action resulted in a systematic campaign by the Israelis to wipe out the resistance in southern Lebanon. Understandably, both the Lebanese and the Syrians were alarmed by the circumstances. On January 2 and again on January 7 high level delegations from the two countries discussed the situation in an atmosphere suggesting close ties between the two governments.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Israeli Defense Minister Peres claimed that Lebanon had been reinforced by some Palestinian troops from Syria. However, the amount of troops said to be involved (reported later to be a battalion) seems somewhat insignificant.<sup>3</sup> It is quite reasonable to assume that Syria was planning for a more decisive contingency since she regarded Israel's almost daily incursions as possible preparation for an assault on Syria through the al Bekaa Valley.

The Rejection Front had apparently purposely intensified the situation in Lebanon by attacking an Army garrison at the Lebanese port town of Tyre on January 20. As a result the PFLP was openly blamed for subversive activity in Lebanon. The PFLP warned that if the PLO did not stop seeking a Middle East settlement it would take action against the PLO leadership. In apparently related incidents, on January 13 and 19 guerillas attempted to destroy El Al aircraft with rockets at Orly Airport in Paris, but on each occasion failed. The perpetrators identified themselves as belonging to the unknown Mohammed Boudya group; their real identities remained a mystery. Events suggest, however, that they were related to the Rejection Front.<sup>4</sup> Not only had the PLO immediately denounced the operations but on January 29 in an effort to restore public opinion it published its decision to "treat the hijacking of airplanes, ships, and trains as crimes," punishable by mandatory sentences of from 15 years

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<sup>1</sup>The guerillas were responsible for raids on settlements on November 30, and December 6 and 18, and for the grenade attack on a theatre in Tel Aviv on December 11. The PLO admitted authorizing the attacks.

<sup>2</sup>Lebanese relations with the moderate Palestinians improved considerably with the Yom Kippur War and the Rabat conference, which was well manifested by Franjieh's selection to present the Palestinians' case on behalf of the Arab governments in the November 1974 UN debate. The Arab World Weekly, 16 November 1974; 11 January 1975.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 7, 8, 22 January 1974.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 13, 19 January 1975; especially The Arab World Weekly, 25 January 1975.

imprisonment to execution.<sup>1</sup>

### Syria's Diplomatic Campaign Against Egypt

The military disposition of the guerillas in Lebanon was not that critical to Syria; the stability of Franjiah's regime was. Assad was more concerned with utilizing his allies, the PLO and the USSR, to reverse Sadat's step-by-step approach. Accordingly, a PLO delegation tried to visit Sadat in February but was rebuffed. Nor were Faisal's efforts able to convince Assad to agree to a request by Kissinger to accept a partial pullback in the Sinai. Faisal's attempts at reducing criticism of Hussein (and for a time, Sadat), however, bore fruit.<sup>2</sup>

The Syrian efforts to undercut Egypt's bilateral approach were stepped up when Kissinger's mid-February visit to Damascus brought no prospect for any near future withdrawal from the Golan. Assad consequently suggested that the term of the UNDOF forces might not be extended after the mandate expired at the end of May. In addition he undertook a diplomatic campaign to head off a separate Egyptian-Israeli agreement which sent envoys to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Tunisia, and Algeria. Al Saiqa had expectedly joined in the effort by issuing a declaration rejecting "partial solutions" in the Middle East. And more significantly deliberations between Syria and Jordan were initiated which would eventually lead to the reestablishment of the eastern front.<sup>3</sup>

Consistent with his efforts, on March 8 Assad offered to unify Syrian political and military commands with those of the PLO.<sup>4</sup> No doubt his gesture was partially due to strong pressure by hard liners within the regime, but in addition Assad had a personal appreciation for unity, gained by his own War of Attrition.<sup>5</sup> The Palestinians, it seems, would not commit themselves before

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 30 January 1975. The PLO had in fact been prosecuting accused offenders for approximately one year.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 15, 21 January; 16 February 1975.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 18, 21, 27 February 1975.

<sup>4</sup>It may be significant that the announcement came only a few days after a visit to Damascus by Jordanian Premier Zaid al-Rifai, and about the same time that Iraq was accusing Syria of aiding the Kurds.

<sup>5</sup>The New York Times, 9 March 1975; The Christian Science Monitor, 9 April 1975.

consulting the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> On March 21 Arafat announced the PLO's agreement with the plan, curiously referring to Damascus as the "Hanoi" of the Palestinian revolution. The PLO was careful to point out, however, that the agreement would not mean subordination to Syria, rather it was intended to closely coordinate positions in the face of Kissinger's attempts to divide the Arab Front. In addition Zuheir Mohsen stated, rather incorrectly one would assume, that the arrangement would provide Syrian protection to the refugee camps and guerilla groups in both Syria and Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> After considerable hesitation, on May 12 the PLO finally moved to open discussions with Syria on the proposed unification, no doubt encouraged by events in Lebanon, as well as new indications that Sadat was ready to deal with Israel. In any case the unification would likely be only cosmetic. Arafat was far too suspicious of the Syrian regime to deliberately render it any more influence over the resistance.

Syrian efforts to harden Egyptian demands undoubtedly contributed to the failure of Kissinger's spring campaign to win a new withdrawal in the Sinai. On the suspension of Kissinger's efforts March 23, Syria called for early resumption of the Geneva negotiations. Additionally the failure paved the way for at least a temporary improvement in relations between the Syria-PLO axis and Egypt. Little time was wasted reestablishing contacts. On April 7 Arafat met with Sadat in Cairo for the first time since 1974, seeking grounds for future coordination. More significantly Assad and Sadat began discussions on April 21 in Riyadh with King Khalid (who became monarch after Faisal's assassination in March), leading to assurances that Sadat would insist on Israeli withdrawal from the Golan as well as the Sinai, renewed military coordination, and joint agreement to extend the UNDOF on the Golan two months in order to coincide with the 31 May termination date for UN forces in the Sinai. Additionally Egypt agreed with the Syrian and Soviet call for a return to Geneva.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arafat had few other sources of leverage over Syria at this time. An-Nahar Arab Report, 17 March 1975.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 22 March 1975; Excerpts of Arafat's speech accepting the unification are reproduced in "Documents and Source Material," Journal of Palestine Studies (Spring 1975), p. 188.

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 24 March; 8, 27 April; 3 May 1975; The Christian Science Monitor, 10, 22, 29 April 1975. Without insisting on PLO participation the Soviets called for a preliminary abbreviated session of the conference to take place before the summer. The New York Times, 22 April 1975.



But the improved relations soon deteriorated. Shortly after Sadat's Salzburg meeting with US President Ford at the beginning of June, Egypt announced her intention of negotiating an interim agreement with Israel.<sup>1</sup> Syria again found herself in the uncomfortable position of facing the full weight of the Israeli military. Assad characteristically responded by trying to secure Syria's flanks in Jordan and Lebanon.

As a result of Premier al Rifai's visit to Damascus in March, and King Hussein's subsequent visit in April, Jordanian relations with Syria improved significantly. Most important Syria and Jordan reached a secret agreement on military cooperation, which at a minimum should ensure close coordination in time of war.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted, however, that since Hussein's reluctant capitulation at Rabat the previous October the King had been anxious to undercut the PLO's position in Syria. Accordingly it is to be expected that Syria made some concessions which would further restrict guerilla activities, especially those like the November 19 raid launched from Syria through Jordan. Indeed, according to Arnaud de Borchgrave, Assad agreed to safeguard Jordan's border from guerilla penetration, thus enabling Hussein to shift troops to the Ghor Mountains facing the Jordan Valley.<sup>3</sup> On his part Hussein agreed to soothe PLO sensitivities by releasing a number of Palestinian political prisoners, enlarging the skeletal PLO office in Amman, and strengthening the token PLA force stationed in-country.<sup>4</sup> Assad likely demanded these compromises from Hussein to reassure skeptics in his own regime as well as the PLO.

Egypt made good her stated intention when on September 4 she signed an interim withdrawal agreement with Israel. In consequence massive Syrian and Palestinian demonstrations broke out in Damascus. The PLO met in the city to discuss ways to increase military and political efforts to disrupt the

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<sup>1</sup>The announcement not surprisingly came June 5, the day the Suez Canal was reopened. The New York Times, 6 June 1975. Ford's "reappraisal" of US Middle East policy beginning March 24 no doubt was related to Sadat's decision.

<sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 8 April 1975; The Christian Science Monitor, 28 April 1975. Relations began to improve in January when Jordan and the PLO agreed to hold periodic meetings to discuss issues dividing them. The New York Times, 5 January 1975.

<sup>3</sup>"The PLO's Ebb Tide," Newsweek, 23 June 1975, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 23 June 1975.



agreement. However, effective countermeasures by the Israelis discouraged a real increase in incidents. That being the case the Palestinian response seems to have best manifested itself in Lebanon where the Rejection Front was exploiting recent civil strife in an attempt to disrupt the accord. By their thinking if they could force Israel to invade southern Lebanon to prevent a militant leftist government from attaining power, Egypt would be forced to join other Arab states in Lebanon's defense. This would obviously terminate the accord. The Rejection Front's position understandably created a dilemma in Lebanon for both the PLO and Syria, which shall be considered shortly.

The situation changed little in the fall of 1975. Opposition in Israel prevented Premier Yitzhak Rabin from making the minimum of territorial concessions President Assad could be expected to get the militant Baath party to accept. Hence a bilateral agreement was still out of the question. Of significance to this study was Syria's concerted effort in October and November to break the stalemate, focusing on the expiration of the UNDOF mandate November 30, and the possibility that failure to extend the force could provoke a fifth Middle East war.<sup>1</sup> To amplify this fear Syria permitted (and may well have planned) two PDFLP raids launched from her territory on October 28 and November 21. The first raid failed, but the second resulted in the deaths of three Israeli soldiers. Not surprisingly the organization was permitted to hold a news conference in Damascus to describe the operation.<sup>2</sup>

Though Assad was unable to tie the mandate's extension to guarantees of Israel's withdrawal from all occupied territory, a compromise position was insisted upon and accepted November 28 by which the PLO would be allowed to participate in a specially convened January Security Council debate on the Palestine Problem.<sup>3</sup> A number of advantages for this most striking gesture of support for the resistance suggest themselves. First, the move provided a

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<sup>1</sup>It coincided with the November 9 Soviet call for reconvening the Geneva conference, to include immediate participation of the PLO. At this same time US officials reported preparations for the transfer of some 20 Soviet MIG-25 fighters, never before delivered to that country. The Christian Science Monitor, 19 November 1975.

<sup>2</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 24 November 1975. The November 21 Israeli letter to the UN Secretary General accusing Syria of special responsibility for the raids is cited in the UN Monthly Chronicle (December 1975).

<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, 29 November 1975.

prudent nod to Syrian pan-Arab hard liners, as well as an opportunity to again postpone an undesired military confrontation. Second, it placed more pressure on Israel to deal with the PLO and thus come to grips with a primary obstacle to a final settlement. And third, it enhanced Syria's status in the Arab world by contrasting her concern for Palestinian interests with Egypt's concern for narrow national interests.

In an effort to regain the diplomatic initiative, on December 5 Egypt called for the immediate participation of the PLO in the Security Council debate then going on to deal with Israel's December 2 airstrike on refugee camps in Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> But Syria was again able to outdo Egypt with the Palestinians when, largely because of her sponsorship, the General Assembly voted a resolution December 5 encouraging the early reconvening of the Geneva conference, by calling for "a just and lasting peace . . . through a comprehensive settlement worked out with the participation of all parties concerned, including the Palestine Liberation Organization."<sup>2</sup> Syria's intent was to return the parley to a forum in which she could exercise better leverage; since the PLO was part of that leverage it could be expected that Syria would attempt to include it in all future Mideast peace talks and discussions.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the necessity of admitting the PLO's influence on the future of peace negotiations the US announced on December 2 that it had formally proposed to the USSR that a preliminary peace conference be reconvened, at which time it could be decided whether to invite the PLO to future talks. The USSR rejected the proposal in favor of its own November 9 plan to convene talks that would include the PLO from the outset.<sup>4</sup> One would expect that Syria had concurred with the Soviet response in view of her strategy to involve as many participants in future negotiations as possible to prevent her

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<sup>1</sup>The Washington Post, 6 December 1975. The Israeli attack, which caused as many as 100 deaths, was particularly embarrassing for the man who had only three months before concluded an agreement with the perpetrators--Anwar Sadat.

<sup>2</sup>The text of the resolution is reproduced in The New York Times, 6 December 1975.

<sup>3</sup>Once more underscoring her support for the resistance, in response to the Israeli airstrike she hinted that she might not curb future guerilla missions from her territory. The Christian Science Monitor, 5 December 1975. She apparently did not carry out the threat.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 3 December 1975.

isolation. This strategy will probably also prompt Syria to keep the Palestine issue before the UN as long as possible, later shifting to a Geneva arrangement only if all parties and all issues can be involved.

### Crisis in Lebanon

Ironically the road to Geneva has been blocked by a Lebanese civil war the outcome of which might seriously effect the political and military position of all major participants. Syria's involvement in the dispute is an especially appropriate subject for concluding this study, for like Black September 1970, it clearly portrays her intentions for and relations with the resistance movement.

At its beginning in April 1975 the civil war in Lebanon was for a time limited to fighting between the right wing Phalangist party and the Palestinian guerillas.<sup>1</sup> But as it escalated through a number of rounds of combat and negotiated cease-fires left wing mostly Muslem Lebanese political groups along with rejectionist and radical guerilla factions joined against the Christian dominated government. Indeed, at some points the fighting appeared to be purely religious in motivation.

Syria did not become involved until a fourth round of fighting, flaring up in September, convinced Lebanese Premier Rashid Karami that outside assistance was needed. At his request Syria pressed the Muslem left to moderate their demand for political change. Arafat joined in the effort, because he, like Assad, believed that continued warfare would have one of two consequences.<sup>2</sup> Either the Christians would win and put an end to resistance power in Lebanon altogether (with intervention by Syria being countered by Israel), or the leftist Muslems would win and thereby prompt Israel to occupy the southern half of the country. The latter possibility also included the disconcerting likelihood that a radical leftist regime would take power in that part of Lebanon remaining. It would be expected that such a regime would force Arafat to the left, or co-opt him entirely, or would encourage radical opposition in Damascus and the "desyrianization" of the resistance.

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<sup>1</sup>The guerillas showed a significant degree of discipline both in combat and in honoring the cease-fire during the first weeks of the dispute. The New York Times, 1 May 1975.

<sup>2</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 25 September; 10 October 1975.

Nonetheless, efforts by Karami, Assad and Arafat to construct a lasting cease-fire met with failure. It seems that the growing involvement of Palestinian splinter groups in what might have otherwise been Christian-Muslim fighting was intensifying and prolonging the conflict. The Rejection Front surely had cause to stir up the pot, particularly after the September 4 Sinai agreement was signed.<sup>1</sup> Their involvement, then, was expected. But interference was also coming from peripheral leftist Muslim groups set up initially by the resistance as a buffer between the Palestinian community and the Christian Lebanese community, and in no way associated with the Syrians. It was these groups (having obtained new sources of supply) that had gotten away from Arafat, and who were making it less possible for the leaders to ensure compliance with a cease-fire.

Syria supplemented her diplomatic action in October by committing al Saiqa guerillas to help police the cease-fire. In addition there is some evidence that she may have added to the battalion or so PLA troops already stationed in the al Bekaa Valley.<sup>2</sup> To protect her own interests in the area, and no doubt to eliminate any possibility for Cairo to benefit from the fighting, Syria and the PLO rejected attempts by conservative Arab governments to resolve the conflict through the Arab League.<sup>3</sup> Thus Syria again used the resistance in her inter-Arab squabble.

Assad and Arafat had been trying to stay out of the conflict as much as possible. Arafat in particular was concerned that the Lebanese situation would confuse his position at the UN and cost him hard-earned international support. Events in December, however, forced both men to become more actively involved. An intensification of the fighting brought rightist leader Pierre Gemayel to Damascus on December 5, and Karami to Damascus on December 22. During this same period Syria promised to help curb the supply of arms to

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<sup>1</sup>Accordingly, the Front was responsible for two incidents of kidnapping in Lebanon. One case in June involved US Army Col. Ernest Morgan; the second case in October involved two US Information Agency employees, Charles Gallagher and William Sykes Jr. The Christian Science Monitor, 23 October 1975.

<sup>2</sup>On December 11 rockets fell suspiciously close to an al Saiqa office in Beirut. The Phalangists announced that they had nothing to do with the incident, which may be true. Al Saiqa involvement in moderating the crisis for Syria, and Mohsen's personal efforts at mediating between Karami and the leftists, undoubtedly made enemies on the Muslim-guerilla side. The New York Times, 12 December 1975.

<sup>3</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 14 October 1975.

leftist extremists in Lebanon, and more importantly announced its firm opposition to any partitioning of the country.<sup>1</sup> The latter was clearly a signal to the leftists that they would be permitted no more than a prudent compromise.

But in January 1976 the situation shifted somewhat when the Phalangists broke the cease-fire by blockading two refugee camps.<sup>2</sup> The seriousness of the action prompted the moderate commando groups to commit themselves to the fighting and thus openly acknowledge for the first time their involvement in the civil war. Syria was no doubt irritated by the fact that the new and more violent disturbances were occurring on the eve of the Security Council debate. Her prestige was being quickly eroded by failure to find a solution. Moreover, the Christian forces appeared to be gaining a military advantage over their adversaries. Accordingly, on January 28 Syria sent 1,500 to 3,000 PLA troops into Lebanon to bolster Muslim forces in the al Bekaa Valley. The following day a Syrian delegation flew into Beirut to arrange what was being called a "last-chance cease-fire."<sup>3</sup> Syria was now telling the rightists that they also would be permitted no more than a moderate compromise.

The tactic of backing her mediation with use of armed force seemed to work--at least temporarily. Syria ensured herself a strong hand in policing the cease-fire by insisting on inclusion of Syrian officers of the joint Higher Military (truce supervision) Committee, as well as the use of PLA forces to patrol potential trouble areas. The Rejection Front was undoubtedly perplexed by the development, knowing full well Syria's attitude towards it. Adding to their concern Syria assured the rightists that she would ensure that the guerillas abided by agreements formerly reached between Lebanon and the resistance.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand in order to mollify Lebanese leftists Syria was

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 7, 23 December 1975; The Christian Science Monitor, 16, 24 December 1975.

<sup>2</sup>There is good reason to believe that the blockades were intended specifically to shift the civil war away from its purely Lebanese aspect to the problem of the Palestinians.

<sup>3</sup>The Washington Post, 22 January 1976; The New York Times, 22 January 1976. Al Saiqa forces in Lebanon had also been increased by extensive recruitment in Syria.

<sup>4</sup>The New York Times, 26 January 1976. This moderation inspired Gemayel to refer to "the sincerity of our Syrian brothers." The Christian Science Monitor, 27 January 1976.



forcing acceptance of more equitable Muslem representation in Parliament.

The most recent developments in Syria's involvement in Lebanon have included the significant buildup of PLA forces, and the estrangement of former Palestinian allies.<sup>1</sup> In setting himself between the embattled factions Assad finds himself committed to a role from which he cannot withdraw without seriously damaging his prestige. Leftist civilian and military elements in particular are challenging his peace keeping role; he responds with an increase in troops. Perhaps more significantly, his recent allies of convenience, Arafat and Hawatmeh, have both become disturbed by Assad's intentions in Lebanon; no doubt they were concerned with the February announcement that Jordan and Syria are intending to form a federation.<sup>2</sup> Their frustration with Syria's constant manipulation of the resistance movement will force them to seek another viable patron who will balance the Syrian influence. There is some evidence that Kamal Jumblat's leftist coalition will perform that function if it can secure enough power in Lebanon within the more traditional framework of government. This being the case it is not surprising that in February al Saiqa was virtually cut off from the rest of the resistance, an indication surely that Arafat is making another attempt to free the movement from Syrian domination.

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<sup>1</sup>As might be expected most of the PLA reinforcements are being deployed in the strategically important al Bekaa Valley.

<sup>2</sup>The Christian Science Monitor, 18 February; 1 March 1976.

#### IV. SUMMARY

The Palestinian national struggle has been a central issue in Syrian politics, courted by several diverse and otherwise hostile political parties since Syria's humiliating military defeat in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. It has been nurtured by the popular belief that Syria is the true patron of pan-Arab nationalism. Accordingly, Syria became the first confrontation state to provide practical assistance to the Palestinian resistance. Then as now the significance of this assistance is based on the fact that Syria is a sanctuary, a logistics base, and on occasion a shelter of last resort for the resistance. It has seldom permitted its borders to become a front line for the guerillas.

Though Salah Jadid's neo-Baath regime (1966-1970) allowed the resistance its greatest amount of freedom, there was nonetheless a strong element of control, exercised through the Baath political organization, the PLA, manipulation of al Fatah, and later through the creation of a subordinate guerilla group--al Saiqa. Jadid's flamboyant radicalism could not escape the simple fact that a Palestinian nationalist movement with strong popular support, a progressive social-political philosophy, and a capable and willing military force could prove to be as fatal to his harshly authoritarian regime as it might be to his anachronistic foes in Lebanon and Jordan. Moreover he realized that the movement could and would be manipulated by other Arab regimes, and would itself ensure its welfare by appealing to diversified sources of support. It was axiomatic that the resistance would seek as much independence as circumstances would allow, whether by appealing to the Arab masses, or to individual states. Thus to safeguard and press his own interests, Jadid understandably pursued the development of controls.

With the rapid growth of resistance power after 1968, and its consequent ability to invoke either Israeli retaliation or domestic strife, it became even more necessary to ensure the availability of another Arab state bordering Israel to act as host for the guerilla raids. As a consequence the neo-Baath

became involved in Lebanon in 1969 and Jordan in 1970. It was this issue, however, which occasioned Jadid's demise. For while Assad had not questioned the principle of sustaining guerilla activity in neighboring countries, he very much questioned the way Jadid went about doing it.

Assad's actions both before and after his November 1970 coup display his more conventional preference for broadly based support, manifested in his attempts at arranging both a viable national front political coalition in Syria, and an alliance of multiple and diverse regimes on the international scene. He clearly rejects the neo-Baath's exclusive association with narrowly "progressive" elements. He likewise rejects their insistence on relying on a war of popular mobilization, and their propensity to allow more independent action by the resistance. He prefers instead a formula of conventional warfare based on operations conducted by regular armies supplemented by militias (and guerilla forces) strictly subordinated to those armies.<sup>1</sup>

As far as the resistance movement is concerned Assad's preferences were manifested by exercising leverage over Arafat and the PLO, discouraging guerilla organizations hostile to Syrian policies, and by changing the composition of leadership (and the chain of command) of al Saiqa. The change in al Saiqa was necessary to reduce its political threat to the national front coalition, and to facilitate its use in the manipulation of the remaining resistance groups. With the guerilla groups under thumb Assad could more assuredly undertake the process of reducing Syria's political isolation. In a remarkable display of conciliation (considering Syria's previous participation in the Black September crisis) Assad offered to mediate the Palestinian-Jordanian problem. In a similar move to gain Hussein's allegiance Syrian aid to guerillas in Jordan was cut, and al Saiqa was withdrawn from Amman. Only when the commandos were threatened with complete destruction in Jordan in July 1971 did Syria risk seriously damaging relations between the two governments. But, demonstrating his desire to maintain firm control over the resistance, in spite of the July hostilities in Jordan Assad still curbed commando operations from Syria, tried to control shipments of arms, and pressured the Palestinian leadership to come to terms with Hussein.

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<sup>1</sup>His theories closely parallel those of his long time associate and present Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas. Tlas, who is somewhat of an expert on peoples' armies, appears to be particularly adamant about controlling commando operations.

The one time that Syria did permit a significant degree of freedom for guerilla operations (during the Syrian War of Attrition 1972), it ended, ironically, with the termination of year-long sanctions against Jordan (December 1972), and reimposition of restrictions on the resistance (January 1973). Israeli retaliatory strikes proved too costly to the Syrian regime compared to the modest benefits achieved by the fedayeen.<sup>1</sup> Assad heeded the lesson in the years following by limiting guerilla operations from Syria to rare and highly controlled incursions, like the two PDFLP raids preceding the expiration of the UNDOF mandate November 1975. Not even during Syria's Golan War, prior to the Syrian-Israeli disengagement (June 1974), did the regime again permit wide-scale guerilla operations from its territory.

Events in Lebanon similarly displayed Assad's desire for a stable and consistent eastern front defense which, since Lebanon would not be a viable confrontation state, would require her to be at least a sympathetic non-combatant. Admittedly Assad is committing himself to defending the existence of the resistance in Lebanon, but even after sending the Yarmouk Brigade to relieve embattled guerillas in May 1973, the agreements reached between Lebanon and Syria in August that year left the resistance a little weaker. The return of troops in 1976 is likewise a move to return to the status quo ante by which the resistance will be a significant irritant to Israel, but not bring destruction upon itself, nor on Lebanon and Syria.

Though Syrian relations with the resistance have been governed by Assad's attempts to subordinate the movement to Syrian strategic considerations, there is one important qualification. The Palestinian national struggle is still very much an important and emotional issue in Syrian politics and as such must be given judicious support by the regime. This is best exemplified by the fact that though Assad is cautiously trying to treat Palestine as separate from the Golan Heights issue, the government has repeated time and again (and with considerable conviction) that peace will come only after Israel's complete withdrawal from occupied Arab territories, and recognition of the national rights of the Palestinian people.

After Egypt's disengagement with Israel in January 1974 Syria was presented

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<sup>1</sup>Jadid reached a similar conclusion when the June 1967 War (and the loss of parts of the Golan) followed closely after his intensification of guerilla activity from Syria.

with justification enough for enhancing her relationship with the guerillas. One should keep in mind, however, that Syrian regard for the pan-Arab philosophy would have sustained a relatively positive relationship regardless. Even with a favorable settlement of the Golan Heights issue Assad would be hard pressed by domestic elements to pursue justice for the Palestinians. The continued importance of the Palestine issue seems then to guarantee a bottom line of Syrian support for the resistance movement.

Relating this to a current situation, Assad will continue to support the guerillas in Lebanon so long as that support does not force a preemptive response from Israel or encourage an activist and thus destabilizing regime in Beirut. Should it become necessary to suppress the resistance he will surely do so, taking as many of the required actions as his leverage over the resistance will permit, and as his political constituency will tolerate.



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